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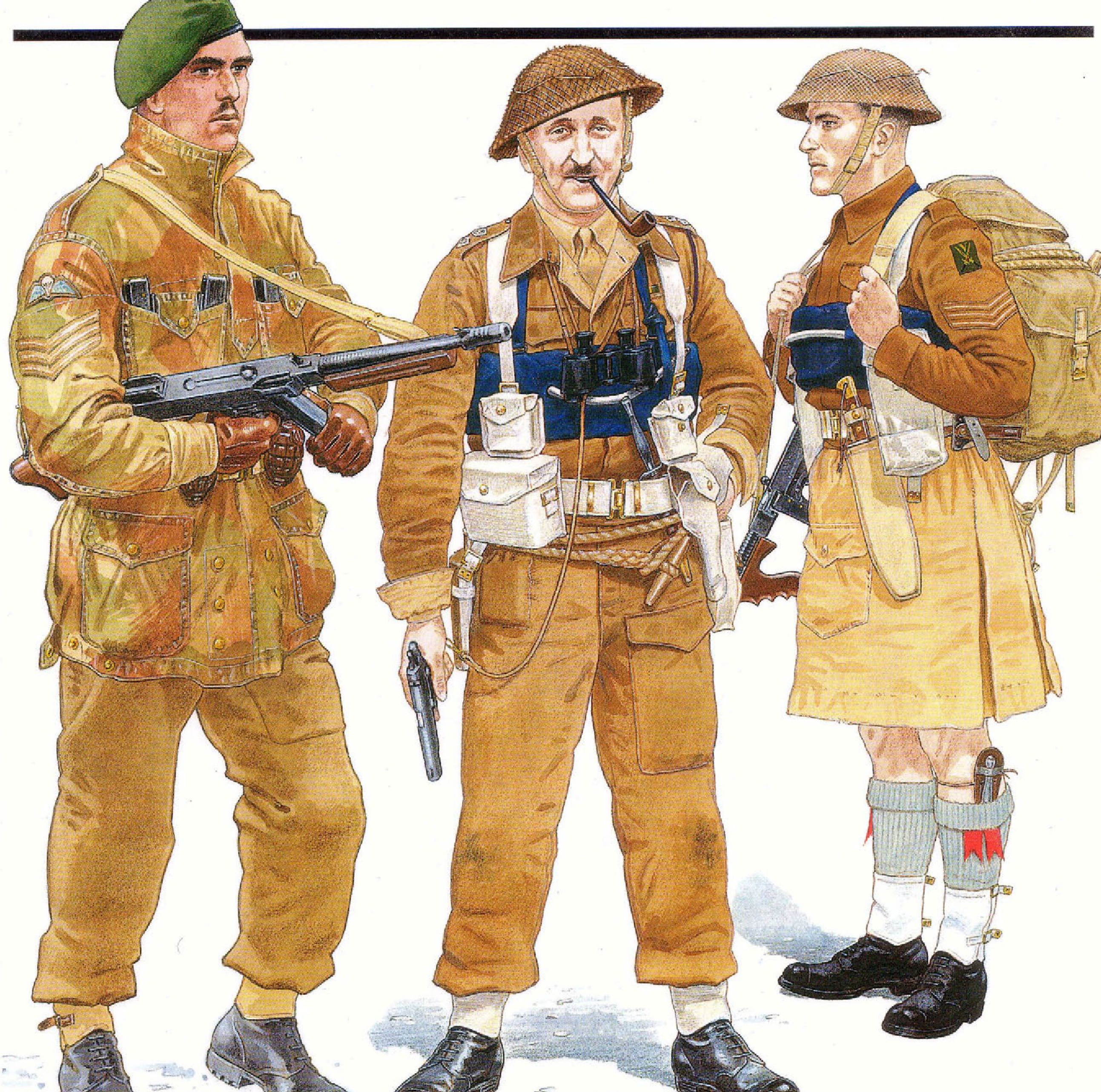
64

ARMY COMMANDOS 1940-1945



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INTRODUCTION

The period from early 1940 to the end of 1942 was a time of gloom and uncertainty for the British. Standing alone against the assembled might of the Axis powers, their armed forces won precious few victories to redress the military disasters that befell them in Norway, Dunkirk, North Africa, Greece, Crete, Malaya, Singapore and Burma. To the rest of the world it seemed to be just a matter of time before Britain and her Empire went the way of other defeated countries and was forced to seek an armistice.

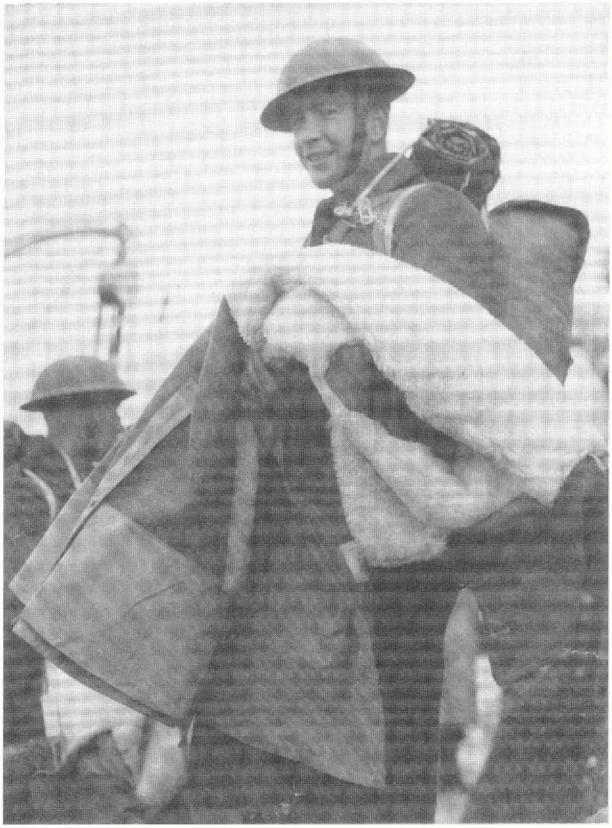
But by 1942 Britain was no longer alone. The insane lust for conquest of the German and Japanese militarists drew the Soviet Union and the USA into the war on the side of the British. Great turning-point battles were fought in Russia, North Africa and the Pacific, and 1943 saw further Allied victories as their armies closed in on Germany and Japan.

In those early, dark years of the war the British public badly needed a champion to strike at Adolf Hitler's Germany. At sea the Royal Navy fought to keep the lifelines of supply open, and in the air Bomber Command struck at the enemy in a way the British understood – for they were being bombed and wished for greater retaliation against the Germans. But it was a small force of soldiers who inspired the British with a series of daring raids against the coasts of 'occupied Europe'. At first these were little more than pinpricks, enhanced by British propaganda to feed a public hungry for war news which was encouraging. For over two years this force struck at the enemy with increasing force and skill, becoming the heroes of the British public (if not of the British Army) and of the British Prime Minister who had created them.

In early 1943 the role of this raiding force was changed to one of assault infantry and it took its place alongside more conventional formations in the battles that led to the defeat of the Axis powers. The raiders were a military élite by any standard of definition. They were called the Commandos.

The orginal caption to this 1942 photograph expresses the public image the Commandos enjoyed at that time. 'Tough dare-devils...carry out most of the raids which take place. They are taught to fight, if need be, with their bare hands ...a terror to the enemy... all are volunteers.' In reality they were not supermen, but ordinary soldiers who were 'super trained'. Note the title of No.2 Troop, No.3 Commando. (IWM)

The term 'Commando' came to prominence with the exploits of the bands of Boer irregulars of that name in the South African War of 1899-1902. (In this context the term is a corruption of the Afrikaans *Kommando*.) Mounted on sturdy ponies and living off the land, the 'Boer *Kommandos* conducted a war of hit-and-run raiding that tied down large numbers of British troops for two years. By the time the Boers were finally persuaded to make peace the British had been taught a series of lessons in irregular warfare that



In the spring of 1940 the British and French sent an expeditionary force to Norway. After a series of defeats at the hands of a German expeditionary force, the Allies evacuated Norway, which subsequently became a prime target for Commando raids. With the 1940 expedition were five Independent Companies, who were issued with a variety of cold-weather clothing, including the sheepskin-lined Tropal coats shown above. (IWM)

they would never forget. Observing the Boer War as a newspaper correspondent was a young former army officer called Winston Churchill. At one time a captive of the Boers, he too never forgot the activities of their *Kommandos.*

What follows is the story of those men of the British Army who, in the Second World War, volunteered for 'special service of a hazardous nature' and by doing so formed the Commandos, Britain's seaborne raiders. They came from a cross-section of the corps and regiments on the military register, seeking action, adventure and an escape from the boredom of conventional service. (Later they were joined by Royal Marine Commandos, units formed by drafting men from existing Royal Marine units. But as this is an account of the Army Commandos, Royal Marines must only be mentioned in passing.)

The history of the Commandos is a tale of triumph and disaster, of bureacratic wrangling over their command and employment, and of hostility endured at the hands of the military establishment. When the fortunes of war began to favour the Allies, the role of Britain's Commandos was changed from raiding to one of a more conventional nature – light, or assault infantry. As soon as the war was won they were disbanded. With Churchill out of office there was no place in the army for the free spirits who had filled the ranks of the Commandos. Some former Commandos chose to remain in the service and went back to the regiments they had left to seek 'special service'. Few prospered. The British regimental system can be unkind to those it judges to be disloyal.

Evolution

In the summer of 1940 the German armed forces were undisputed conquerors of mainland Europe, from Norway to the Franco-Spanish border and from Poland to the Channel coast. Only Britain refused to make terms with Adolf Hitler's Germany, but, with her army badly mauled in the battles that preceded the Dunkirk evacuation, it was unlikely that she could attempt offensive operations across the Channel for several years, if ever. Hitler then turned his attention to the east and further conquest.

In Britain the leadership of the country had by then passed to Winston Churchill, who immediately set about the business of putting the defence of the home islands into the best possible order, whilst attempting to do whatever he could to strike at the enemy. On 4 June Churchill told the House of Commons of the outcome of the Dunkirk evacuation, and on the same day wrote to his Chiefs of Staff to ask, 'If it is so easy for the German to invade us... why should it be... impossible for us to do anything of the same kind to him.'

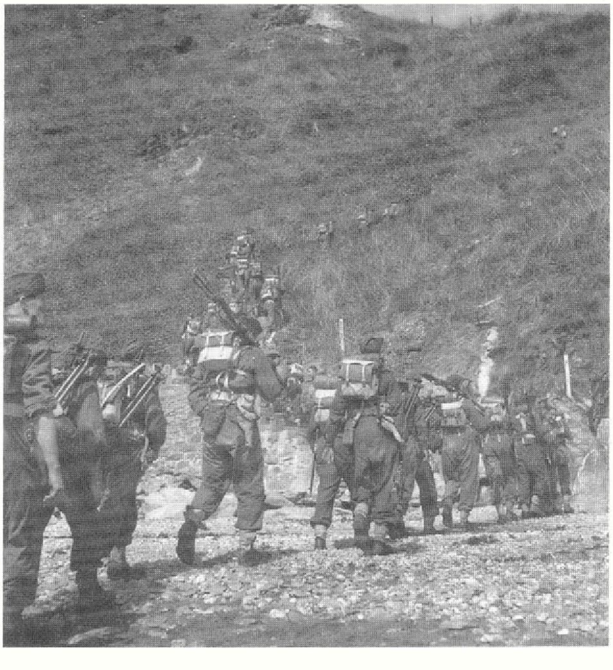
That evening Lt.Col. Dudley Clarke, a staff officer at the War Office, drew up the outline of a raiding force that he called – for want of a better name – Commandos (Clarke was a South African by birth). His ideas were passed to the Prime

Minister who ordered that 'Enterprises must be prepared with specially trained troops of the hunter class who can develop a reign of terror down the enemy coast... I look to the Chiefs of Staff to propose measures for a ceaseless offensive against the whole German-occupied coastline, leaving a trail of German corpses behind.' Word was immediately passed to Clarke, 'Your Commando scheme is approved... get going at once. Try to get a raid across the Channel mounted at the earliest possible moment'. Promoted to colonel, Clarke headed up a new section of the secretariat of Military Operations – MO9 – with the task of organising 'uniformed raids.'

Less than three weeks later, on 24 June, motor-launches landed a force of 115 volunteers from No.11 Independent Company at various points on the French coast in the region of Boulogne. Their orders were to test the German defences and to bring back prisoners. One party encountered nothing and re-embarked. A second failed to get ashore. A third got ashore near Le Touquet and killed two Germans. Without searching the bodies or discovering what it was they had been guarding (it turned out to be a dance-hall), the corpses of both were towed behind the crowded returning launch and lost. The fourth party, after nearly blundering into Boulogne harbour, eventually landed and encountered a patrol of German cyclists. An officer, attempting to shoot at them, dropped the magazine of his Thompson sub-machine-gun with a clatter. In the hail of German fire that followed a bullet all but severed the ear of Col. Clarke, who had accompanied the patrol as an observer. The British re-embarked and the operation was concluded with the safe return of all the men and craft. Clarke had his ear sewn back on during the return journey. The men in one boat 'spliced the mainbrace' and drank the rum carried aboard. Disembarking unsteadily at an English port they were nearly arrested by the military police, who suspected them of being deserters.

Although the raiders were subsequently fêted as heroes, the operation had not been an auspicious start to Churchill's 'reign of terror down the enemy coast'. Nevertheless, the official communiqué was able to state, 'In co-operation with the Royal Air Force, naval and military raiders carried out a reconnaissance of the enemy coast. Landings were effected, contact made with German troops and casualties inflicted before our troops withdrew without loss.' *The Times* trumpeted, 'BRITISH RAIDERS LAND ON ENEMY COAST! SUCCESSFUL RECONNAISSANCE.'

A second raid on 14 July fared no better. Its purpose was to destroy an airfield on the island of Guernsey, in the Channel Islands. One hundred and thirty-nine men of the recently-formed No.3 Commando and No.11 Independent Company set out on the raid but only 40 managed to land on Guernsey, soaked to the skin after wading through heavy surf. They encountered no Germans and were able to do little damage to the installations they had intended to destroy. Returning to the beach they discovered that the weather had worsened and their launch was forced to stand off-shore. It was necessary to swim for it, and to leave behind three men who were non-swimmers. Churchill was not pleased, and said so. 'It would



'Men of No.1 Special Service Battalion (Commandos)' training in England, 1941. The men in the foreground carry Bren light machine-guns and the tripods on which the gun could be mounted for fixed-line or anti-aircraft shooting. Note the pistols being carried by the l.m.g. numbers; an unusual practice in the British Army at the time. (IWM)

'Commandos in training', November 1941. Undergoing instruction in mountain and rock climbing, a party of Commandos take a break to consume their 'haversack rations'. (IWM)

be most unwise to disturb the coasts of these countries by the kind of silly fiascos which were perpetrated at Boulogne and Guernsey – the idea of working up all these coasts against us by pin-prick raids and fulsome communiqués is one to be strictly avoided.' His 'trail of corpses' mood appeared to have evaporated after the Boulogne raid, of which he noted that it was 'unworthy of the British Empire to send over a few cut-throats!'

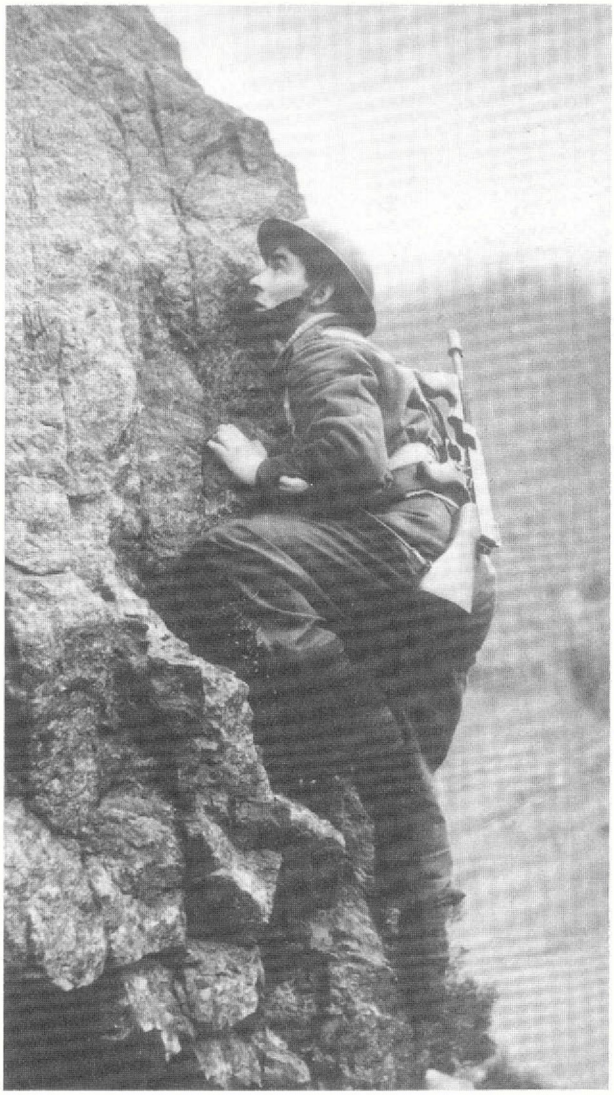
The Prime Minister set about putting the raiding house in order. On 17 July he issued a directive covering the waging of irregular warfare against the enemy. This set up a Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.), which Churchill was wont to call the 'Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare', and a Directorate of Combined Operations. As the head of Combined Operations he appointed Admiral Sir Roger Keyes who became responsible for the direction of all raiding operations and their co-ordination with naval and air forces. Keyes, at 68 years of age, was a hero of the Gallipoli landings and the raid at Zeebrugge in the Great War. He had behind him a brilliant career in the Royal Navy after which he had entered Parliament. He set about organising the volunteers for the Commandos into a force that he intended to use on large-scale operations, a role somewhat different to that for which they had been formed. Forty-three days had elapsed since Lt.Col. Clarke had written the name 'Commandos' into his outline for a raiding force. In six weeks there had been two abortive raids and the beginning of dealings at high level which were to shape the destiny of the new force.

The Special Service Brigade

The troops who were to form the Commandos came from two sources. The men of the units of Home Commands who responded to a signal issued on 20 June calling for volunteers for special service of a hazardous nature, and those from the 'Independent Companies' formed in April from volunteers of the Territorial Divisions. Five of these Independent Companies had already seen action on a disastrous expedition to Norway.

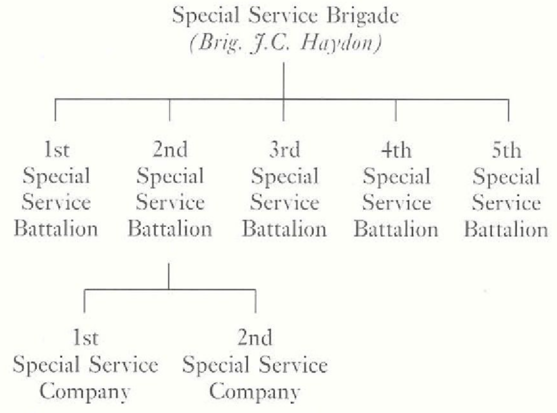
In July Adolf Hitler had issued his 'Directive No.16'. This expressed his exasperation at Britain's refusal to seek terms, and ordered landings to be made in southern England. A preliminary to these was to be the destruction of the Royal Air Force, resulting in the aerial Battle of Britain which commenced in the autumn. Against this background ten Commandos were assembled, each with ten 50-man 'troops', and by the autumn of 1940 they were merged with the Independent Companies into a 'Special Service Brigade' consisting of five 'Special Service Battalions', each with two 'Special Service Companies'. This was an anti-invasion measure, and once the RAF had won the Battle of Britain and the threat of German landings had receded, each Special Service Battalion was re-organised into a headquarters and two Commandos – thus establishing that title – and eventually the Battalion organisation was dropped in 1941. The Special Service – S.S. – designation foisted on the Commandos was never popular and some officers simply refused to recognise or use it.

By March 1941 the Special Service Brigade consisted of 11 Commandos, each with an organisation of six troops rather than the original ten. Troops now had three officers and 62 men, a compliment that could fit comfortably into two of the new assault landing craft (ALCs, later LCAs) which were being brought into service. The refitting of suitable vessels as landing ships and the building of landing craft had been a slow business which had, up until then, prevented the Commandos from launching raids on a large scale.



From the same sequence of photographs, a Commando soldier is captured negotiating a rock-face. Note the Thompson submachine-gun slung across his back. An American weapon of .45 inch calibre, the "Tommy gun" was used by the Commandos throughout the war, becoming one of their symbols. (IWM)

Order of battle November 1940-early 1941


Special Service Brigade
(Brig. J.C. Haydon)
1st Special Service Battalion
2nd Special Service Battalion
3rd Special Service Battalion
4th Special Service Battalion
5th Special Service Battalion
1st Special Service Company
2nd Special Service Company

Special Service half-Battalion detached in Northern Ireland

Commando training

Commanding officers of the Commandos under formation were chosen from volunteers by MO9. The COs then chose their own officers, who in turn chose their own men. Criteria varied from one Commando to another, but misfits were soon 'returned to unit' – a procedure that ensured that all ranks remained keen and worked hard. From the very start Commandos rejected barracks, preferring to live in billets, usually in coastal towns, for which they received a daily allowance to pay for their food and lodging. Thirteen shillings and fourpence (68p) for officers, and 6s.8d. (33p) for other ranks. By the standards of the day this was generous, allowing some to be pocketed as a supplement to pay. Best of all, life in billets meant that there were no barrack guards, cookhouse fatigues, or many of the petty and irksome chores of life in a barrack room. (Of course, on active service these allowances were not paid.)

Great emphasis was placed on self-reliance. A Commando soldier was expected, as a matter of course, to look after his weapons and kit and to show initiative under all circumstances. From the very start there was none of the pettifogging discipline common to the British Army of the time.

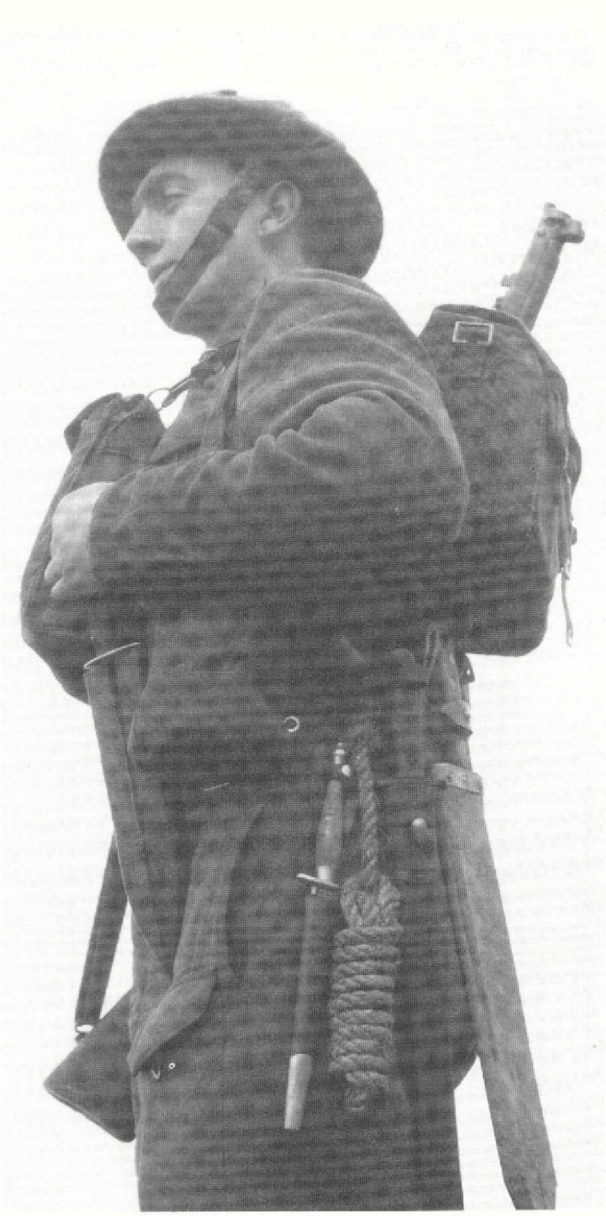
Initially, training for operations was the province of commanding officers, varying from unit to unit. The standards to be achieved in No.2 Commando were later laid down by its then CO, Lt.Col. Newman, as a 'Commando Catechism' thus:-

Service in a commando

1. The object of Special Service is to have available a fully trained body of first class soldiers, ready for active offensive operations against an enemy in any part of the world.
2. Irregular warfare demands the highest standards of initiative, mental alertness and physical fitness, together with the maximum skill at arms. No Commando can feel confident of success unless all ranks are capable of thinking for themselves; of thinking quickly and of acting independently, and with sound tactical sense, when faced by circumstances which may be entirely different to those which were anticipated.
3. *Mentally.* The offensive spirit must be the outlook of all ranks of a Commando at all times.

Commandos learning how to live off the land. Men of No.1 Commando watch as a man of their unit demonstrates how to butcher a sheep. The original caption does not make it clear how the animal was come by! (IWM)

4. *Physically.* The highest state of physical fitness must at all times be maintained. All ranks are trained to cover at great speed any type of ground for distances of five to seven miles in fighting order.
5. Cliff and mountain climbing and really difficult slopes climbed quickly form a part of Commando training.
6. A high degree of skill in all branches of unarmed combat will be attained.
7. *Seamanship and Boatwork.* All ranks must be skilled in all forms of boatwork and landing craft whether by day or by night, as a result of which training the sea comes to be regarded as a natural working ground for a Commando.
8. Night sense and night confidence are essential. All ranks will be highly trained in the use of the compass.
9. Map reading and route memorising form an important part of Commando training.
10. All ranks of a Commando will be trained in semaphore, Morse and the use of W/T (radio).
11. All ranks will have elementary knowledge of demolitions and sabotage. All ranks will be confident in the handling of all types of high explosive, Bangalore torpedoes, and be able to set up all types of booby traps.
12. A high standard of training will be maintained in all forms of street fighting, occupation of towns, putting towns into a state of defence and the overcoming of all types of obstacles – wire, rivers, high walls, etc.
13. All ranks in a Commando should be able to drive motorcycles, cars, lorries, tracked vehicles, trains and motorboats.
14. A high degree of efficiency in all forms of fieldcraft will be attained. Any man in a Commando must be able to forage for himself, cook and live under a bivouac for a considerable period.
15. All ranks are trained in first aid and will be capable of dealing with the dressing of gunshot wounds and the carrying of the wounded.
16. These are few among the many standards of training that must be attained during service in a Commando. At all times a high standard of discipline is essential, and the constant desire by all ranks to be fitter and better trained than anyone else.



A Commando soldier, 1942. By this time certain items of weaponry and equipment that were to become 'Commando' symbols had begun to be issued. Among those were the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger and the toggle-rope, seen above. In addition our hero carries a bayonet, a machete and – in his left hand – the Fairbairn-Sykes No.2 fighting knife. This last item closely resembled the sword of a Roman soldier. This impressive assembly of cold steel was probably put on for the benefit of the cameraman! (IWM)

17. The normal mode of living is that the Special Service soldier will live in a billet found by himself and fed by the billet for which he will receive 6s.8d. per day to pay all his expenses.

'Unarmed combat,' 1942. Commandos practising the hazardous business of tackling an armed enemy with bare hands. Note the first-pattern entrenching tool carried by the man on the left. (IWM)

18. Any falling short of the standards of training and behaviour on the part of a Special Service Soldier will render him liable to be returned to his unit.

Training to attain such high standards went on whilst the Special Service companies deployed to resist the expected invasion. Men of No.1 and No.2 Commando, following yet another of Churchill's directives, left for parachute training. (In February 1941 a detachment from the parachute Commandos destroyed the Tragino viaduct in southern Italy, creating alarm out of all proportion to the effort as Italian manpower and resources were diverted to defend what was now seen to be a vulnerable part of their homeland. Eventually No.2 Commando became No.11 Special Air Service Battalion and a new No.2 Commando was raised in its place.)

As the threat of a German invasion receded, the tempo of training increased, with the emphasis on raiding. Much of this was carried out at the Irregular Warfare School in Scotland. This had been established in May 1940, running courses for 'special forces' in the mountains and lochs of the wild highland country. Endurance marches, cliff climbing, swimming with full kit, killing with and without weapons, seamanship and boatwork, night operations, map reading, fieldcraft, stalking and much else was taught, at a pace that only the fittest survived.

There were to be many famous graduates of the Irregular Warfare School, including David Stirling, who went on to form the Special Air Service, Mike Calvert, the 'Chindit' leader, and Freddie Spencer

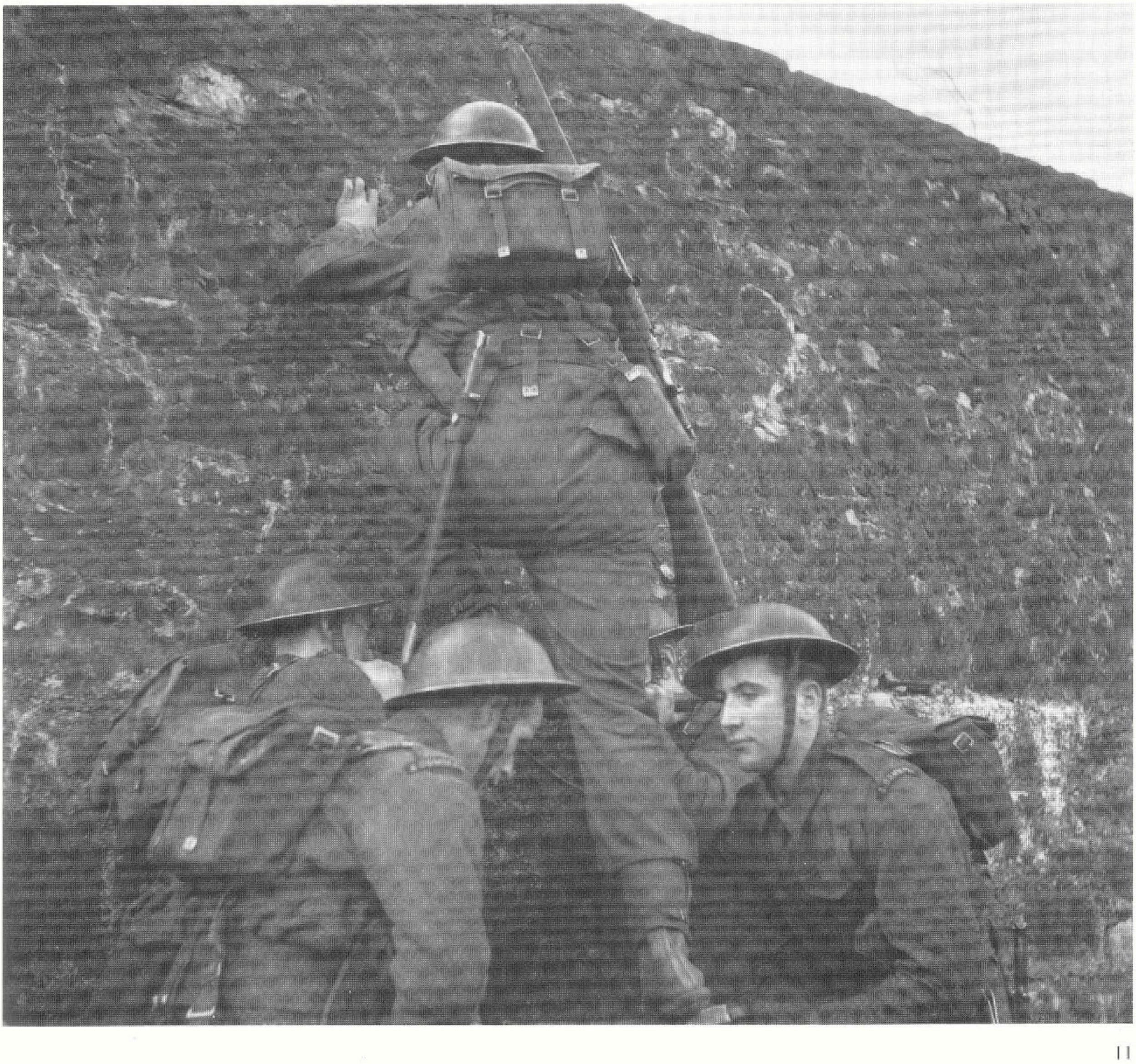
Chapman who operated behind Japanese lines in Malaya. But all who passed its punishing regime had reason to be proud of their achievement.

RAIDING: 1941

As the officers and men of the Commandos strove to prepare themselves for raiding the enemy, a bureaucratic struggle was taking place as to how and where they were to be employed; indeed, even whether they were to continue in existence.

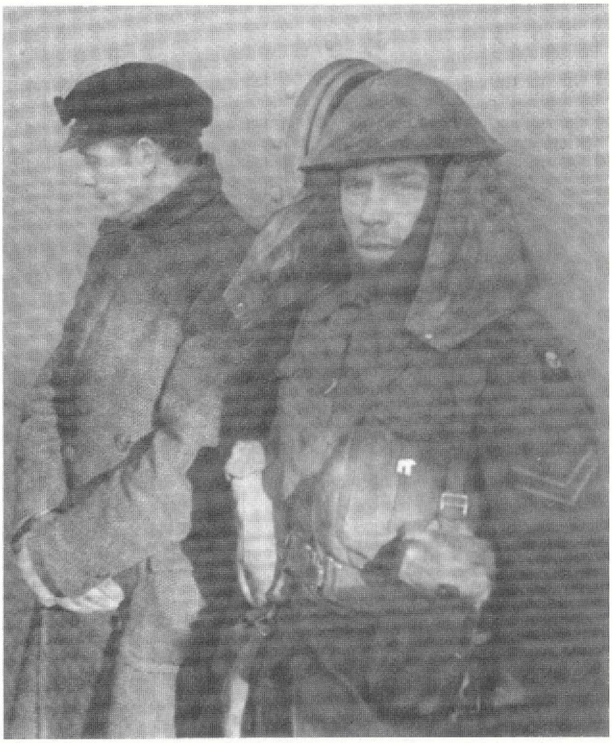
To most high-ranking service officers, Commandos were anathema. They considered the new force to be a misuse of good officers and men who would have done better to have remained with their units. In the view of these officers the war would be won by conventional means, not by sideshows. But the new force and its director were protégés of the Prime Minister. The Commandos had been established at the direct order of Winston Churchill, and few of the Whitehall warriors wished to incur his wrath by openly declaring their

Commando training, 1942. Men of No.3 Commando scale a wall with a ladder of rifles. Note the '3 COMMANDO' shoulder titles and the rope-soled boots worn by the climber. (IWM)



hostility to his brainchild. But there were many bureaucratic pinpricks they could inflict and these manifested themselves in the frequent changes of role, title and organisation that took place in the early months of the Commandos' existence. These sometimes resulted in casualties. The formation of the Special Service Brigade removed the need for MO9, and in doing so brought about the resignation of Col. Clarke.

Within Combined Operations differing schools of thought existed as to how the Commandos were to be used, with Admiral Keyes discouraging everything but his notions of large-scale raiding – 'big shows'. Many plans for operations were drawn up, and many were shelved, as Keyes' autocratic manner alienated more and more of those whose co-operation was essential to Combined Operations. In the new year of 1941 his force was weakened when part of the Special Service Brigade was hived off for service in the Middle East. (Called '*Layforce*', its story is told later.)



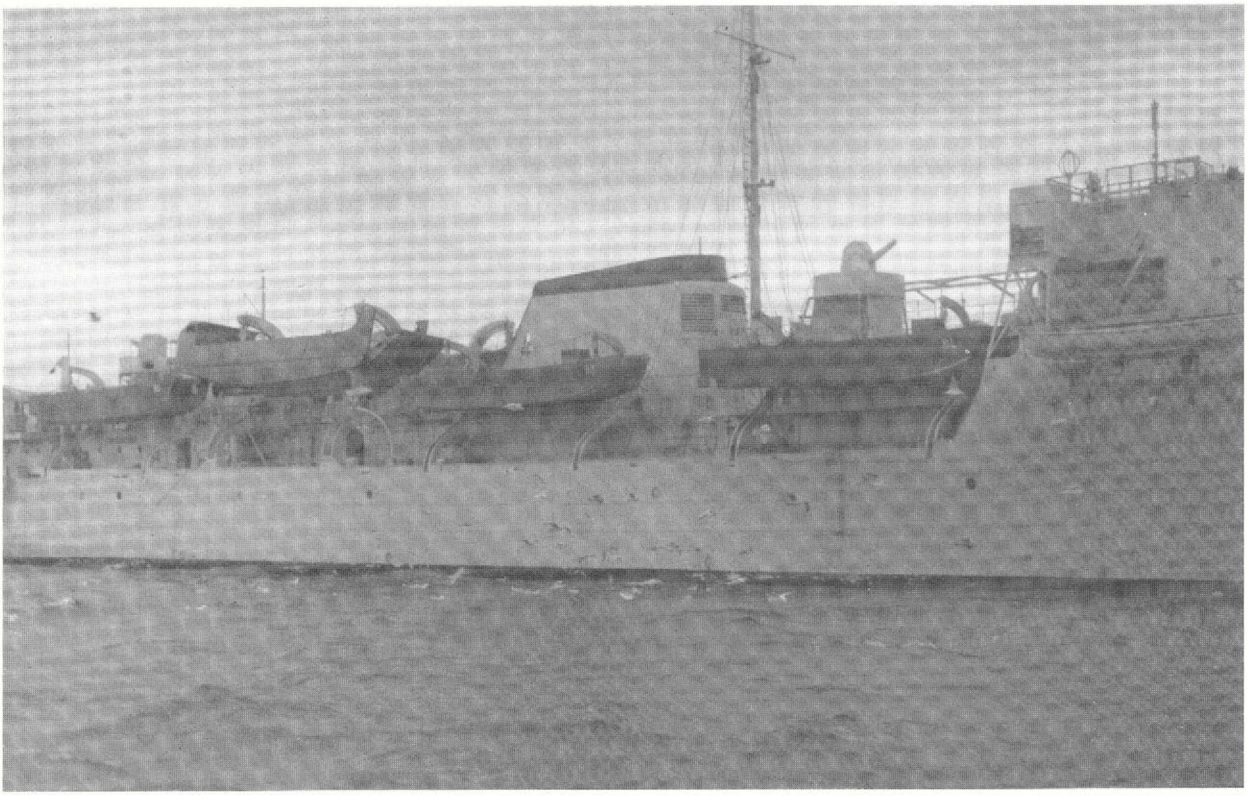
Early Commando insignia. A corporal of D Troop, No. 3 Commando guards a Norwegian civilian suspected of being a 'Quisling', or Nazi collaborator. The Lofoten Islands raid, March 1941. Note the patch worn on the sleeve, a skull with the letter 'D'. (IWM)

Such small-scale raiding that took place at this time was mostly undertaken by detachments from various Commandos. In time this type of operation became the province of those men who began to move from the Commandos into units forming for such a purpose. (More under the control of S.O.E. than Combined Operations, these included No.62 Commando, also known as the Small Scale Raiding Force, and the Special Boat Section, also known as 101 troop of No.6 Commando.) Few of the minor raids of 1941 fared any better than those of 1940.

At Ambleteuse, south of Calais, 17 men of No.12 Commando carried out a reconnaissance in July, encountering no enemy but sustaining casualties when their returning craft was fired on. Landings further south by 30 men of No.5 Commando in August also failed to find contact with the enemy. In September parties from No.1 Commando went ashore in Normandy – returning after a fire-fight – and on the Cherbourg peninsula, where they ambushed a German cycle patrol and brought back the body of one of the cyclists. Finally, in November, an attack by a troop of No.9 Commando on a gun position at the mouth of the Seine failed in its objective.

The first large-scale Commando raid was launched in March 1941. Its targets were four small ports in the Lofoten Islands, which lie off the north-west coast of Norway, 900 miles from the British Isles and just inside the Arctic Circle. At each location was a factory for processing fish oil, all of which was being shipped to Germany for the extraction of glycerine, a vital component in the manufacture of high explosives.

The raiders were carried to their targets aboard two of the newly-converted infantry landing ships, escorted by five destroyers. Apart from a German gunboat, which was dealt with by the Royal Navy, there was no opposition to the men of No.3 and No.4 Commandos who, with parties of sappers, carried out the raid. In freezing conditions the factories were put to the torch, 800,000 gallons of petrol and oil in store was destroyed, 18,000 tons of shipping was sunk, 300 men were brought back to Britain for the Norwegian forces in exile, and 200 Germans – mostly merchant seamen – were taken prisoner. (Perhaps the most valuable prize



HMS **Princess Beatrix**, *one of the infantry landing ships that carried the Commandos to the Lofoten Islands. A former Channel ferry converted to carry troops and stores; with davits capable of carrying and launching assault landing craft, the* **Princess Beatrix** *took part in many Commando raids. Visible in this photograph are three LCAs (Landing Craft, Assault. Capable of carrying 35 fully-equipped troops) and an LCM (Landing Craft, Mechanised) for the landing of a single armoured fighting vehicle. (IWM)*

was a number of wheels for a German *Enigma* encoding machine. Finds such as these enabled the British to decode much German radio traffic over the course of the war, and to gain valuable knowledge of German intentions.) The Lofoten raid proved to be a model operation, and the force returned to Scapa Flow to a rapturous welcome.

Despite this success no more large-scale Commando operations were mounted until the end of 1941. A raid by Canadian troops on Spitzbergen in August destroyed the mines there, large stocks of petrol and oil, 450,000 tons of coal, and brought back to Britain 2,000 Russian miners and their families. The operation, carried out by line troops, added weight to the anti-Commando lobby, which scored its first major victory in October when the prickly Sir Roger Keyes was replaced as Chief of Combined Operations. He gave his version of the events that had led to his downfall in a speech to the House of Commons in which he claimed to have been, 'frustrated at every turn in every worthwhile offensive operation I have tried to undertake', and condemned 'the negative power of those who control the war machine in Whitehall'. To his great credit, Keyes continued to use his influence as a Member of Parliament to further the interests of the Commandos.

On 27 October 1941 a new Chief of Combined Operations took up his post. Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten was 41 years of age, he had a close connection with the Royal family, enjoyed a reputation as a dashing naval commander and as a go-getter. He determined that there were to be no more unsuccessful raids by those forces under his operational control. Plans were laid for the formation of the first of the Royal Marine Commandos and for the centralisation of all Commando training at Achnacarry, in the highlands of Scotland. Planning also went ahead for yet more raids on Norway.

Accompanying the Commandos to Vaagso and Maaloy Islands in December 1941 were official photographers and film cameramen. The raid therefore became the best chronicled operation in the history of the Commandos. In terms of propaganda, the film footage was widely shown, and stills from the film were distributed with the other photographic material. Left is one such still showing Commandos advancing through Vaagso. (IWM)

The first was scheduled for 9 December, when No.6 and No.12 Commandos were to attack the town of Floss. But at the last minute the commander of the naval group carrying the Commandos to their target was unable to fix his position with certainty and the raid was called off.

On Boxing Day, 26 December, the navy took the Commandos back to the Lofoten Islands, where No.12 Commando, with 68 Norwegian soldiers and sapper demolition teams, landed unopposed by the German garrison, who surrendered without a fight. The aim of these landings was the creation of a diversion for a raid on Vaagso, further to the south. After the destruction of installations No.12 Commando withdrew, taking with them 29 German prisoners and over 200 Norwegians.

The next day a naval force, which included a cruiser, four destroyers and two infantry landing ships, put ashore No.3 Commando, with two troops of No.2 Commando and medical and engineer personnel from No.4 and No.6 Commandos, at the port of Vaagso Island and the island of Maaloy. This time the Germans fought back. After a naval bombardment Maaloy was overrun in a matter of minutes, but the Commandos in the town of South Vaagso met fierce resistance. By 13.45 hours the town was cleared, and an hour later the force withdrew. It had been a fruitful raid. Fifteen thousand tons of shipping had been destroyed, as had fish-oil processing plants, warehouses and dockyards. The German garrison had been defeated and over 100 prisoners taken. With the returning Commandos came 70 recruits for the Norwegian Army. Commando losses were 19 killed and 57 wounded.

In the wake of the raids came German reprisals against the local Norwegians, protests from King Haakon and his government-in-exile in London, and a German reinforcement of their northern flank that saw over 370,000 troops garrisoning the area by 1944. No further large-scale raiding was carried out against targets in Norway by the Commandos. Activity there took the form of sabotage directed by the S.O.E.

Order of battle 1941-1943

Early in 1941 the S.S. Companies were re-organised as Commandos. By early 1943 the order of battle was thus:-

Special Service Brigade
(Brig. R.E. Laycock)

- No.1 Commando
- No.2 Commando
- No.3 Commando
- No.4 Commando
- No.5 Commando
- No.6 Commando
- No.9 Commando
- No.12 Commando
- No.40 (Royal Marine) Commando
- No.41 (Royal Marine) Commando
- No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando
- No.14 Commando
- No.30 Commando
- No.62 Commando
- Special Boat Section & Combined Operations Assault Pilotage Parties
- Commando Depot Section & Snow Warfare Camp

And so ended 1941, a year of mixed fortunes for the Commandos based in Great Britain. But away in the Middle East the Commandos of *Layforce* had fared much worse.

Layforce

In February 1941 No.7, No.8 and No.11 (Scottish) Commandos, commanded by Colonel Robert Laycock had set sail for the Middle East with the mission of raiding in the eastern Mediterranean. They were carried aboard the infantry assault ships HMS *Glenearn*, *Glenroy* and *Glengyle*, converted merchantmen with davits adapted to launch assault landing craft. Sir Roger Keyes had seen them off, and *Layforce*, as the group became known, voyaged via Capetown to arrive in Egypt in March. There they were joined by No.50 and No.52 Commandos, which had been raised in the Middle East, to bring the strength of *Layforce* to 2,000 men.

Shortly after the arrival of the Commandos the British position in the eastern Mediterranean came under threat from separate German offensives launched in North Africa and Greece. In a rapidly deteriorating situation *Layforce* lost its ships to the campaign in Greece and was redeployed as an infantry brigade in one of the divisions confronting the Germans and Italians in North Africa. For reasons now unclear, but typical of the attitude of higher authority, the Commandos were given new titles. No.7 Commando became A Battalion, No.8 Commando became B Battalion, No.11 (Scottish) Commando became C Battalion,

Yet another dramatic still showing Commandos moving against the glare of burning buildings. (IWM)

A more contrived still of the fighting in Vaagso. A Commando corporal pauses to look around for the enemy. (The cameraman filming this episode would, of course, have been in clear view of any Germans off-camera!) (IWM)

and No.50 and No.52 Commandos were amalgamated to form D Battalion.

In April, Col. Laycock was ordered to mount a raid on the enemy-held port of Bardia. On the night of 19/20 HMS *Glengyle* landed men of A Battalion late and at the wrong beach after a series of misfortunes in navigation. The Commandos shot up the Italian garrison, destroyed four guns of a shore battery and fired dumps of stores. Unfortunately their withdrawal left 70 of their number behind to be captured.

In May, *Layforce* began to break up. C Battalion was sent to the island of Cyprus, and the remaining battalions were sent to aid in the defence of the island of Crete, which, by the time the Commandos got there on the 27th, had been under German airborne attack for a week. The units of the depleted *Layforce* then fought a series of rear-guard actions across the island to the beaches earmarked for evacuation. But of the 800 men of *Layforce* sent to Crete only 200 returned to Egypt.

On 9 June C Battalion were landed to seize a crossing over the Litani River, south of Beirut in Vichy-French-held Syria. The Vichy regime had demonstrated their anti-British feelings by allowing the Italians to build airfields in Syria. This brought about a British invasion of their territory, spearheaded by an Australian formation which needed a crossing over the Litani. This was secured, after a close-fought battle, by C Battalion, but at a cost of over 120 casualties, which included the Commanding Officer. The Second-in-Command, Major Geoffrey Keyes, son of Admiral Keyes, brought C Battalion out of action and back to Cyprus.

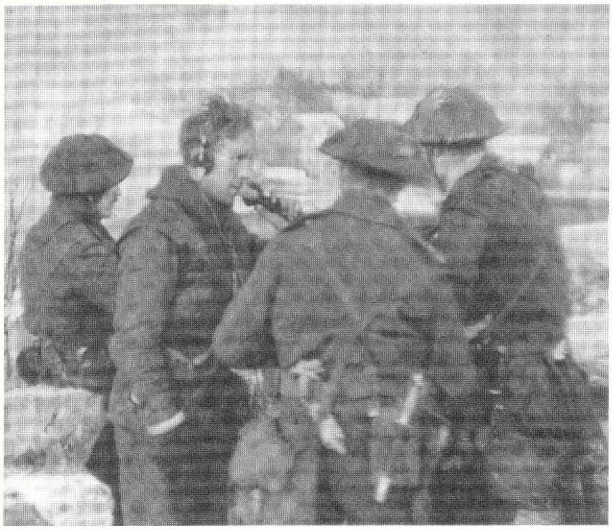
Commandos operating a 3-inch mortar at very close range indeed. Another movie still of the fighting in Vaagso. (IWM)

In July, Commandos of B Battalion carried out a raid at Tobruk with great success. But the steady drain of casualties and reinforcements for line units had by now reduced *Layforce* to an ineffective state. In August it was disbanded. Some of the officers and men who were left went to units of their regiments present in the theatre, some found their way into units such as the embryonic Special Air Service, and some went to the Far East.

When Winston Churchill learned of the fate of *Layforce* he was furious at the way its ships and men had been used. He immediately ordered that a Middle East Commando be re-formed, that a local Director of Combined Operations be appointed for the Middle East, and that his forces be put under the command of the Naval Officer commanding in the Mediterranean. He concluded his instruction with the comment, 'Middle East Command has indeed maltreated and thrown away this valuable force'. But it proved difficult to put together a Commando unit in accordance with Churchill's edict. That which was assembled included L Detachment of the Special Air Service Brigade as No.2 Troop, 60 men from the former C Battalion under Geoffrey Keyes, now a lieutenant colonel, as No.3 Troop, Palestinian soldiers from No.51 Commando as No.4 and No.5 Troops, and personnel from the Special Boat Section as No.6 Troop.

In November, No.3 Troop of the Middle East Commando, still referring to themselves as 'No.11 (Scottish) Commando', carried out a daring raid, the aim of which was to kill General Rommel, the leader of the German and Italian forces in North Africa. Under the overall command of Col. Laycock the force landed from two submarines on the 15th and began their approach on what was thought to be Rommel's headquarters at Beda Littoria. The raid was timed to coincide with a parachute raid by L Detachment and a resumption of the offensive by British forces. Problems with the landing and the exact location of the target called for a change of plan, and three days later Lt.Col. Keyes and 17 men made their way to Rommel's supposed quarters at Sidi Rafa. In the middle of a stormy night they marched boldly up to the target house and demanded to be let in. A fire-fight ensued in which Keyes was killed, and the raiders withdrew to trek to their rendezvous with the submarine. The weather was too rough to get out to the craft, and the Commandos were eventually found and attacked by the pursuing enemy. They attempted to escape in small parties, but only one, Col. Laycock and a Sergeant, made their way back to the British lines after a 40-day march across the desert.

Rommel had not been at either of the locations reported to have been his headquarters. (They turned out to be supply depots.) He was in his forward headquarters awaiting the British attack. Unsuccessful though the operation was it resulted in the gazetting of the first Victoria Cross to a Commando – in this case a posthumous award to Lt.Col. Keyes.



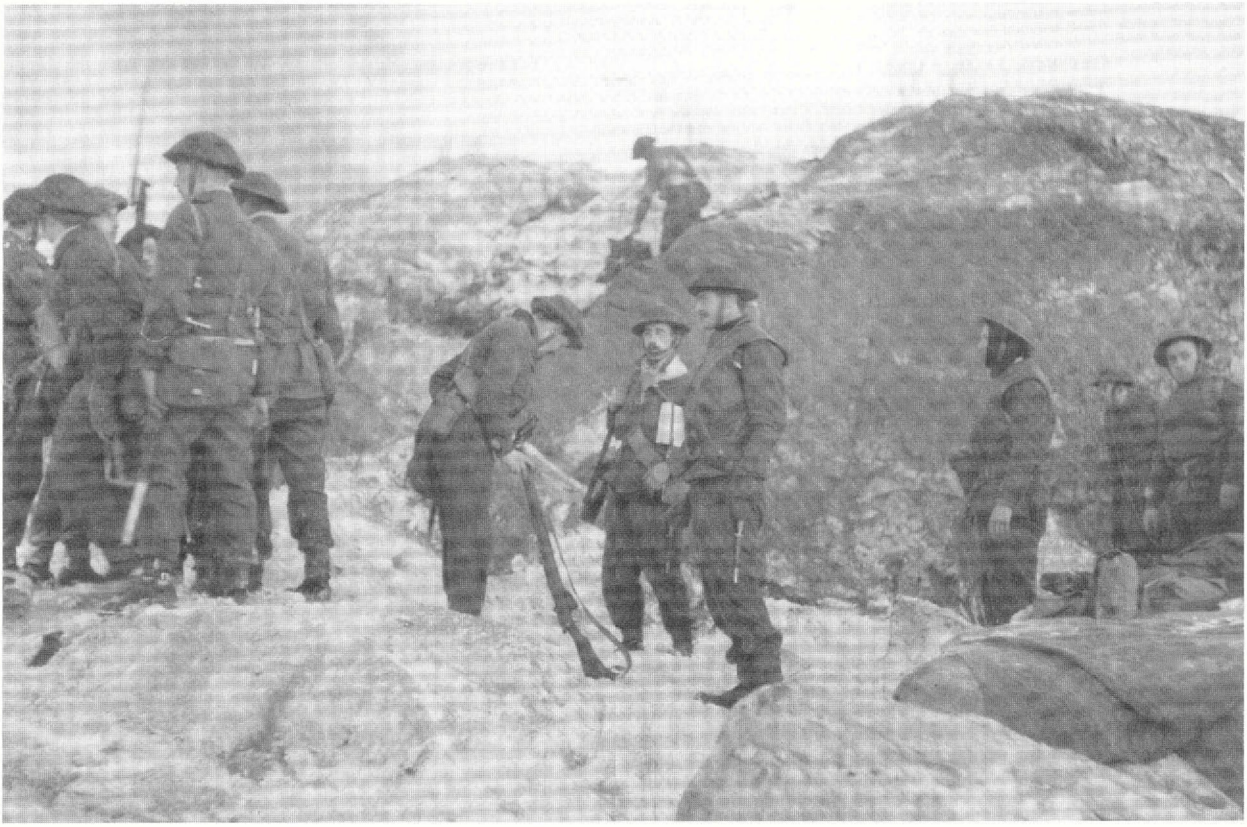
A Commando command post during the fighting in Vaagso. A signaller operates a Wireless Set No.18. Note the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger and toggle-rope carried by the officer in the centre, and the German helmet slung on the bayonet of the man on the right. Yet another movie still. (IWM)

1942 – YEAR OF THE GREAT RAIDS

This year started with a raid that was the very model of a combined operation, in which the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force, parachute troops and Commandos joined together to attack a German cliff-top radar station at Bruneval, on the coast near Le Havre. The British needed details of the Würzburg radar apparatus, used by the Germans to guide their night fighters to British bombers. It was decided to capture a set and to bring it to England for study.

On the night of 27/28 February, under cover of an RAF bombing raid, C Company of the newly-formed 2nd Parachute Battalion dropped on Bruneval from ten Whitley bombers. Most men landed within 600 yards of the radar site and rapidly overcame German resistance, enabling the radar technician, who had parachuted with them, to begin dismantling the Würzburg set. But soon the local enemy garrison was fully alert and closed in on the paratroops, upon whom fire began to be directed. Freed from its mounting, the German radar equipment was trundled towards the beach, covered by the paratroops, who now began to fall back. At the cliffs a brisk battle was fought to knock out a pill-box and secure the evacuation area before the LCAs and motor gunboats of the Royal Navy came inshore to pluck the paratroops off the beach. Aboard each LCA were light machine-guns of No.12 Commando, and these opened up to give covering fire as the flotilla drew away, guarded on their return journey by destroyers of the Royal Navy and Spitfires of the RAF.

At a cost of 15 casualties a most successful raid had been brought off. But the growing competence of Britain's raiders also served to ensure that the enemy directed more and more resources to the fortification and garrisoning of the Channel coastline. Just how much was to become painfully apparent later in the year.



The island of Maaloy was taken with little opposition, after which the raiders moved to Vaagso as reinforcements. Here they wait for the craft to ferry them to the battle. Third from left is the legendary 'Mad Jack' Churchill, a Commando officer who landed on Maaloy armed with the Claymore sword seen at his side. (IWM)

The St Nazaire raid

At this time the constant threat to Atlantic convoys posed by Germany's battleships, especially the *Tirpitz*, tied down considerable British and American naval resources. Winston Churchill, in particular, was obsessed with the *Tirpitz* and wrote, 'The whole strategy of the war turns at this period on this ship.'

To operate in the Atlantic the German battleship needed a base on the Atlantic seaboard of southern Europe. The French port of St Nazaire, with its huge dry-dock, was an obvious base of operations for the *Tirpitz*, and a decision was made by the British to destroy the port facilities by means of a Commando raid. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Newman's No.2 Commando was selected for the task.

St Nazaire lies on the north bank of the River Loire, six miles inland from the mouth of its estuary. With a 250-mile voyage from a British port, followed by a hazardous up-river approach, the chances of effecting surprise were slim. Once landed the Commandos were required to destroy the dry-dock and render several submarine pens unusable. To undertake this daunting task Newman had 150 men from his own Commando and 80 demolition men from six other Commandos. (This number was later increased to 44 officers and 233 men.)

The naval forces involved were led by Commander R.E.D. Ryder and included the destroyer HMS *Campbelltown*, formerly the USS *Buchanan*, which was to be packed with 9,600 pounds of high explosive. The crew of the *Campbelltown* were to ram the gates of the dry-dock with their ship and set a delayed fuze on her lethal cargo. Ryder's flagship, a motor gunboat, was to lead 16 wooden-hulled motor launches, carrying Commandos, and a motor torpedo boat up-river. The craft were to fly German naval ensigns and be prepared to answer any challenges with responses from German naval codebooks captured at Vaagso. The elderly *Campbelltown* was to be disguised as a German vessel and to have extra armour plating fitted. Once ashore the Commandos were to move off to their assignments, which were to overcome the dockside defences, to secure the areas to be destroyed and to get on with the business of demolition. Secondary lock-gates, pumping machinery and access to the submarine pens were the main targets. HMS *Campbelltown* was scheduled to ram the gates of the dry-dock at 0130 hours on 28 March. The Commandos were then to spend two hours ashore on their mission of mayhem, and the force was to withdraw beyond the retaliation of the enemy's aircraft before daybreak.

That was the plan. The general opinion was that, with luck, the force might get up to the port and carry out it's destruction. But the chances of getting away afterwards were slim. One senior officer wryly commented, 'There's certainly a VC in it.'

Almost time to go! A Commando officer checks his watch as the hour for evacuation draws near. A movie still from the film of the Vaagso fighting. (IWM)

Newman and Ryder's force set sail from Falmouth on 26 March escorted by destroyers and battling against rough seas that made conditions in the launches extremely uncomfortable. Off St Nazaire on the night of the 27th, the vessels took up formation for the approach to the port and parted with their escorts. At a speed of ten knots they crept up-river, secure until 0100 hrs when they were spotted from the shore and reported.

The German defences had already been alerted by a RAF diversionary raid. They were now warned to beware of landings. Shortly afterwards a searchlight caught the *Campbelltown*, which steamed in its full glare whilst challenges were flashed and warning shots were fired. The British flotilla signalled replies according to the German codes and kept up the bluff until 0127 hours, when the ruse was discovered and the batteries ashore opened up in earnest. Tracer of all colours flew across the water at the illuminated vessels. Down came the German flags and up went White Ensigns as the guns of the flotilla began to reply to the hail of fire now being directed at it with increasing accuracy. Now at full speed, the *Campbelltown* struck the dry-dock gates at 0134 hours, driving her bows deep and riding up as she shuddered to a halt and the Commandos aboard began to swarm ashore.

The casualties amongst the motor launches were heavy indeed. Many of the craft were sunk or set alight by the hail of German fire before they made shore, the missiles ripping through the wooden hulls and into the men aboard. Only five launches made it to the quayside to land those aboard who had survived, but once ashore the Commandos set about their allotted tasks, still under hail of fire from flak towers and ships in the harbour.

In all, less than 100 Commandos landed. Nevertheless, they tackled the German gun positions with small arms and grenades, whilst their demolition teams placed charges and set fuses. Unable to get at the submarine pens, all efforts were concentrated on the destruction of the pumping station and the lock gates, after which

Getting the wounded away to the landing craft at Vaagso. To combat the intense cold the Commandos are wearing leather jerkins beneath their battledress blouses. Their bulky appearance is further enhanced by partially-inflated life jackets. (IWM)

Col. Newman established a defensive perimeter from which the survivors of the force might be evacuated. Commandos and sailors, fighting together, withstood the attacks now directed against them by the combined forces of two anti-aircraft battalions, the harbour garrison troops and crews of the warships and U-boats in the harbour. Newman and his 60 men were by now facing a force of 2,000 Germans. But there was to be no evacuation. The river outside the harbour was a shambles of burning British craft, with only Ryder's gunboat and the motor torpedo boat apparently surviving. After going alongside the *Campbelltown* to take off those still aboard, Ryder ordered the motor torpoedo boat to launch a torpedo at the outer lock gates of the old harbour entrance.

This done, the attempt to get clear began. Against all odds Ryder's motor gunboat and six surviving launches got back to England. The motor torpedo boat was sunk whilst trying to rescue survivors, and a seventh launch was sunk in a battle with a German destroyer, but 242 sailors and Commandos returned from the 611 who had set out.

Stranded in St Nazaire, Newman ordered his men to attempt to break out of the perimeter whilst there was still the cover of darkness, and to try to get away to Spain and Gibraltar. Few got very far, but five managed to evade capture and made their way home.

The high explosive aboard HMS *Campbelltown* detonated at 1030 hours the following morning, killing a large number of Germans who were inspecting the vessel or watching it from the dockside. The explosion burst the dry-dock gate and rendered the dock useless for the rest of the war. Days later the torpedo launched at the old harbour entrance exploded, trapping the vessels within. Other delayed-action charges made the Germans so nervous that they shot a number of

Their task completed, the Vaagso raiders make their way down to the harbour and the landing craft that will carry them back to their ships. (IWM)

French workmen and men from their own labour organisations, confusing their uniforms for those of the British Commandos.

There were many decorations gazetted for the St Nazaire raid – 'the greatest raid of all', as it has been called. The Victoria Cross went to Cdr. Ryder, Lt.Cdr. Beattie and Able-Seaman Savage of the Royal Navy, and to Lt.Col. Newman and Sgt. Durrant of the Commandos. One hundred and sixty-nine sailors and Commandos were killed and 200 taken prisoner, whilst No.2 Commando had, in a single action, lost the commander who had brought it to such a fine pitch, and many of its best men. Work began immediately to re-form the Commando under the leadership of Lt.Col. Jack Churchill, who would later take it to the Mediterranean to fight in Sicily, Italy and Yugoslavia.

Madagascar

The Japanese entry into the war and their spectacular successes in South-East Asia posed a threat to British sea routes to India and the Middle East. The Vichy-French island of Madagascar was seen by the Allies as a potential base for the Japanese Navy, and in order to deny this to them a British fleet began landing troops on the island in May. Fighting went on from then until the signing of an armistice with the Vichy-French forces in October, and in this fighting No.5 Commando played their part, especially in the assault landings.

In Britain, Winston Churchill had by now conferred upon Lord Louis Mountbatten the ranks of Vice Admiral, Lieutenant General and Air Marshal so that, as Chief of Combined Operations, he might sit as the fourth Chief of Staff. (The elevation from junior naval captain to such an exalted appointment horrified the service establishments.) Lord Louis presided over an organisation which held all the means of waging amphibious warfare, and which was growing all the time with the conversion of Royal Marine units to the Commando role, the establishment of Commando training and holding units, and the interest in cross-channel raiding shared with S.O.E. The Small-Scale Raiding Force (S.S.R.F.) – also known as No.62 Commando, and sometimes S.T.S.62 – was the idea of Lord Louis, operating as part of Combined Operations but at the direction of S.O.E. It drew its manpower from the Commandos and conducted a number of raids on the coast of France and the Channel Islands in 1942. Small raids were also carried out by parties from other Commandos, the Special Boat Service and, on one occasion, Canadian troops.

Dieppe

It was the Canadian Army in Britain who were to provide most of the troops for the next great raid of 1942. For over two years the Canadians had been guarding southern England from a receding threat of invasion, and by the summer of 1942 they were spoiling for a fight. Equally belligerent were those calling for a Second Front, the landing of Allied forces in France to relieve German pressure on the Russians. Until this time Britain had pursued a policy of striking at the Germans in Europe by means of bombing and Commando raids; whilst being engaged in major campaigns in the Middle East and the Far East. But political pressure for a Second Front was building, despite the fact that Britain lacked the proper resources for such an undertaking.

In April, a decision was taken by the Chiefs of Staff to mount a raid in much greater force than before. Combined Operations headquarters considered the seizure of a functioning port to be a prerequisite to any invasion of Europe, and the object of this 'reconnaissance in force' was to test the feasibility of such an undertaking. Most of the troops involved were to come from the 2nd Canadian Division, supported by a Canadian tank regiment and detachments from No.3 Commando, No.4 Commando, the recently-formed Royal Marine A Commando, No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando and the United States Rangers. The target was the French port of Dieppe, which was to be assaulted head-on by the Canadians, with their flanks protected by the Army Commandos. The port would be held for a day whilst its defences and a nearby airfield were destroyed and 40 landing craft in the harbour captured. The

Commando training and operations. A rifle inspection aboard an infantry landing ship. Note the manner in which the inspecting officer carries his Fairbairn-Sykes dagger. Note also the way leather jerkins are worn. One of a series of photographs of No.6 Commando preparing for a raid on the Ardour estuary in April 1942. This operation was aimed at cutting rail and road communications between France and Spain, but was called off when bad weather prevented the Commandos landing. (IWM)

Commandos with demolition equipment land from an LCM during the training for the Ardour estuary raid. Note the early-pattern Bergen rucksacks in which explosives were carried. (IWM)

German air force was to be drawn into battle above Dieppe, which was thought not to be heavily defended.

The original plan for the operation called for an aerial bombardment and an assault by parachute troops before the landing of the main force. Set for July, the raid was cancelled because of bad weather. When the operation was revived and scheduled for 19 August, it was to be without the bombing, with Commandos in place of the paratroops, and with a great deal depending on the element of surprise.

When the left wing of the ships carrying the attackers to Dieppe ran into a German flotilla at 0347 hours on 19 August, surprise was lost, a sea battle ensued and the raid degenerated into a major military disaster. Only on the right flank, where Lord Lovat's No.4 Commando carried out a successful attack on a German battery at Varengeville, was there any success. Lovat had split his force into two groups, one of which engaged the battery frontally, whilst the second – led by Lovat himself – outflanked the position. The Germans put up a fierce resistance, but the position was taken and the six 150mm guns destroyed before the Commandos

The demolition completed, the Commandos withdraw to their landing craft. (IWM)

withdrew to their landing craft. Their casualties had been heavy, but they had carried out their mission. On this flank, two Canadian battalions also got ashore and were able to give a good account of themselves, but the remainder of the force met with the full fire-power of an alerted enemy and were slaughtered on the beaches. The German garrison had been conducting an anti-invasion exercise. All defence posts were manned, many of them skilfully sited concrete emplacements, built under a programme of fortification recently ordered by Hitler.

The boats carrying No.3 Commando to the left flank of the assault had been dispersed in the clash at sea and only Major Peter Young and 18 men were able to attack the Berneval battery, which was by then engaging the British shipping. Young and his men neutralised the battery by sniping until their ammunition was exhausted. Only then did they make their way back to the beach and make good their escape.

Few men of the Royal Marines A Commando got ashore. When their commanding officer saw the carnage on the beaches he signalled to the craft carrying his men to retire, losing his life in doing so, but saving his unit from certain disaster. The French Commandos and American Rangers attached to British units gave a good account of themselves, but bravery shown by them and by all the Canadian and Commando units could not disguise the extent of the disaster at Dieppe once the casualties were added up.

The Navy had lost a destroyer, many valuable landing craft, and over 500 men. The air forces had lost over 100 aircraft – more than twice those lost by the German air force. Of the 6,000 troops who had gone to Dieppe over 4,000 were dead, wounded or taken prisoner. Twenty-nine of the latest Churchill tanks had fallen into German

Lord Louis Mountbatten, head of Combined Operations, addresses men of No.6 Commando prior to the Ardour estuary raid. No.6 Commando was one of those which chose to wear the Scottish soldier's 'Tam o'Shanter' bonnet as a headdress. (IWM)

hands, as had over 1,500 rifles and machine guns and 130 mortars. The Germans salvaged all these items from the beaches and the wreckage of beached landing craft, along with vast quantities of ammunition and explosives.

Dieppe showed those clamouring for a Second Front that there could be no short cuts to the establishment of a bridgehead in Europe. It also highlighted the futility of a frontal assault on a target such as Dieppe without a massive bombardment from sea and air before an attempted landing. Commenting afterwards a German general said that the British, 'will not do it like this a second time'. His prediction was proven correct 22 months later when British, Canadian and American armies came ashore over open beaches in Normandy, bringing their own pre-fabricated ports with them.

The Führer Order

Amongst the carnage of the Dieppe fighting, the Germans discovered the bodies of 12 of their men who had been bound after capture. Some had

The Bruneval raid, February 1942. Men of No.12 Commando man Bren light machine-guns and a .55-inch anti-tank rifle on an assault landing craft being launched from an infantry landing ship. The LCAs were to evacuate the paratroops who had just brought off a successful raid on a German radar station. Note the drum magazines fitted to the Brens. These were intended to be used for anti-aircraft purposes. They held 100 rounds of ammunition as against the 28 rounds of a box magazine. (IWM)

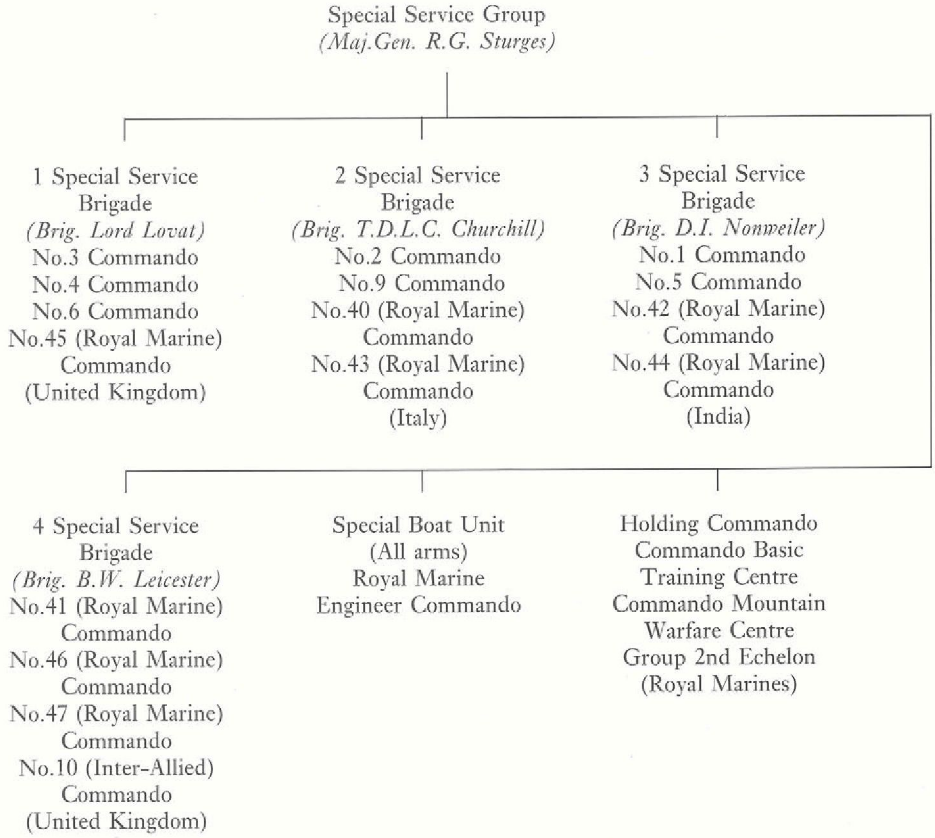
been tied up in such a way that they had strangled to death. Also found was a copy of the operational order for the raid which specified, 'Wherever possible, prisoners' hands will be tied to prevent destruction of their documents'. The incident led to the tying-up, and later manacling, of prisoners taken at Dieppe – an act that was followed by reprisals against German prisoners. In early October a Commando raid against the Channel Island of Sark left behind the bodies of Germans who had again met their deaths after having been taken prisoner and tied up.

On 18 October 1942 Adolf Hitler issued an order that became known as the infamous *Commando Order* in which he stated:-

'For some time now our enemies are using methods in their prosecution of the war which are outside the agreements of the Geneva Convention. Especially brutal and vicious are the members of the so-called

Order of battle 1943-1945

In November 1943 a Headquarters, Special Service Group, took command of all Commando Forces. Its order of battle in March 1944 was thus:-



Special Service Group
(Maj.Gen. R.G. Sturges)

1 Special Service Brigade
(Brig. Lord Lovat)
No.3 Commando
No.4 Commando
No.6 Commando
No.45 (Royal Marine) Commando
(United Kingdom)

2 Special Service Brigade
(Brig. T.D.L.C. Churchill)
No.2 Commando
No.9 Commando
No.40 (Royal Marine) Commando
No.43 (Royal Marine) Commando
(Italy)

3 Special Service Brigade
(Brig. D.I. Nonweiler)
No.1 Commando
No.5 Commando
No.42 (Royal Marine) Commando
No.44 (Royal Marine) Commando
(India)

4 Special Service Brigade
(Brig. B.W. Leicester)
No.41 (Royal Marine) Commando
No.46 (Royal Marine) Commando
No.47 (Royal Marine) Commando
No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando
(United Kingdom)

Special Boat Unit
(All arms)
Royal Marine Engineer Commando

Holding Commando
Commando Basic Training Centre
Commando Mountain Warfare Centre
Group 2nd Echelon (Royal Marines)

Notes: No.48 (Royal Marine) Commando replaced No.10 (Inter-Allied)

Commandos, which have been recruited, as has been ascertained to a certain extent, even from released criminals in enemy countries. Captured orders show that they have not only been instructed to tie up prisoners, but also to kill them should they become a burden to them. At last orders have been found in which the killing of prisoners is demanded.

'For this reason ... Germany will in future use the same methods against these sabotage groups of the British, i.e., they will be ruthlessly exterminated wherever German troops may find them.

'I therefore order: That from now on all enemy troops which are met by German troops while on so-called Commando raids, even if they are soldiers in uniform, to be destroyed to the last man, either in battle or while fleeing.

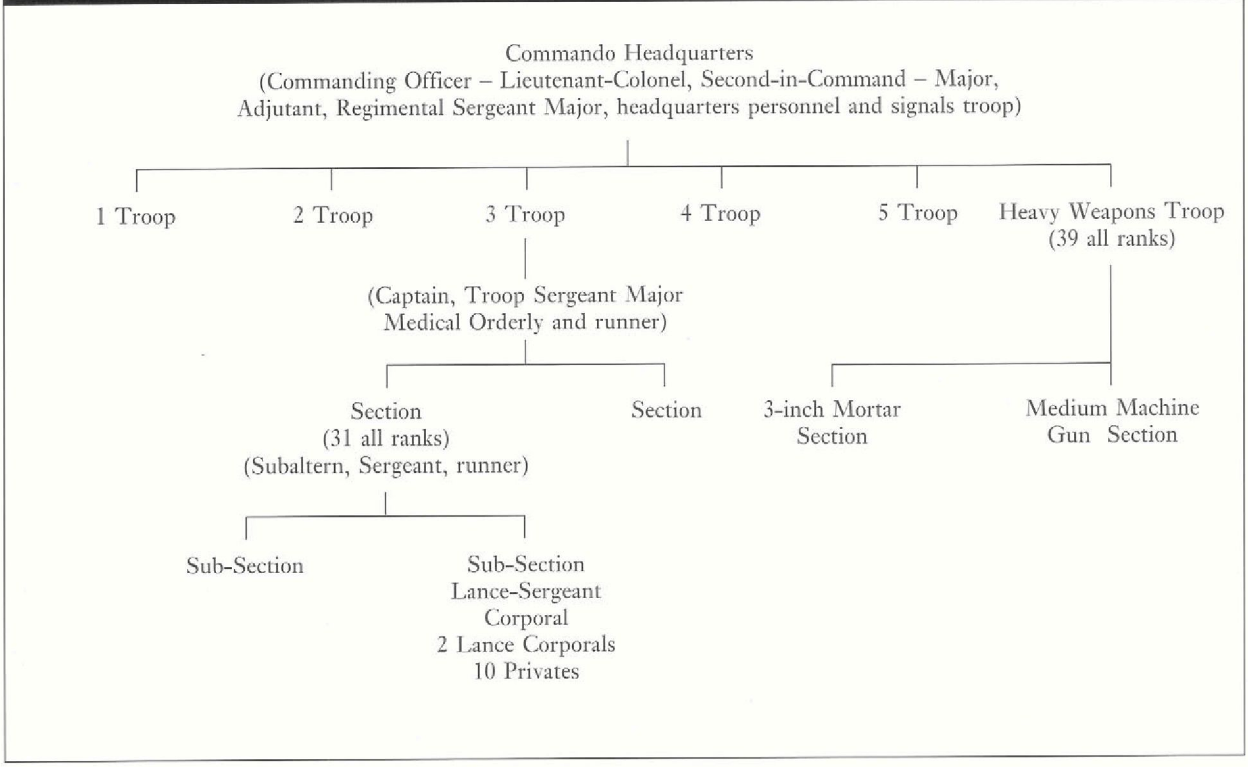
'This order does not affect the treatment of enemy soldiers taken prisoner during normal battle actions (major attack, major seaborne or airborne landings). It also does not affect prisoners taken at sea or flyers who saved themselves by parachute and were taken prisoner.

I shall have all Commanders and officers who do not comply with this order court-martialled.

(Signed) A.Hitler'

Under this order many captured Commandos, men of the SAS, Airborne forces, SBS, LRDG,

Order of battle, 1943 Commando (460 all ranks)


Commando Headquarters
(Commanding Officer – Lieutenant-Colonel, Second-in-Command – Major, Adjutant, Regimental Sergeant Major, headquarters personnel and signals troop)
1 Troop
2 Troop
3 Troop
4 Troop
5 Troop
Heavy Weapons Troop (39 all ranks)
(Captain, Troop Sergeant Major Medical Orderly and runner)
Section (31 all ranks) (Subaltern, Sergeant, runner)
Section
3-inch Mortar Section
Medium Machine Gun Section
Sub-Section
Sub-Section
Lance-Sergeant
Corporal
2 Lance Corporals
10 Privates

Royal Marines and escaping or evading Allied servicemen taken captive behind enemy lines were executed in one of the less savoury episodes of the Second World War.

North Africa and other raiding

In November 1942 an Anglo-American force invaded the Vichy-French possession of Algeria, spearheaded by Commando units, including No.1 and No.6 Commandos. The task of the Commandos was to land ahead of the main forces, raiding batteries and seizing vital ground. These were tasks they were trained and equipped to do, but they soon found themselves embroiled as line infantry in the battles that followed the advance into Tunisia. Fighting without heavy weapons or the administrative back-up of line infantry Commandos sustained such casualties that by the time they were withdrawn from the line in April 1943, their total strength was down to 150 men.

Other Commando activities in the Mediterranean in 1942 included operations by the Special Boat Section against Rhodes, northern Italy and Crete, and a raid on Tobruk by the Middle East Commando.

In December a small group from No.2 Commando raided and damaged a hydro-electric power station at Glomfjord, Norway. This station supplied the country's principal aluminium-producing plant, and the Commandos were able to shut it down by demolishing power-house machinery and water feed pipes. In trying to make good an escape one of the raiders was killed and eight captured. In accordance with the *Commando Order*, the two officers leading the raid were shot.

In the Far East small parties under Commando-trained officers harassed the Japanese in Malaya and Burma. In every British theatre of operations Commandos continued to strike at the enemies confronting them, but the time of raiding was drawing to a close. With the tide of war turning in the favour of Britain and her Allies, it was time to review the operational role of the Commandos.

The Bruneval raid. The LCAs return and the men from No.12 Commando re-embark. (IWM)

1943–1945

By early 1943 the need for the seaborne raiders, Churchill's 'troops of the hunter class who can develop a reign of terror down the enemy coast', had all but disappeared. Britain had become a junior partner to her new Allies and Winston Churchill had concerns other than those of Combined Operations.

He began to lose his close personal interest in the Commandos. Small-scale raiding had become more and more the province of a plethora of specialist units, mostly under the direction of agencies such as S.O.E., and the Commandos underwent a re-organisation that transformed them into brigades of assault or light infantry. These included Royal Marine Commandos, formed at the instigation of Lord Louis Mountbatten by converting Royal Marine units from other roles.

The transformation of Commandos from raiders to infantry brought about internal re-organisation that saw the inclusion of support weapons, transport and administrative back-up. The Special Service Brigade was expanded into a Special Service Group of four brigades – each of four Commandos – and the Commando training organisation was cranked up to provide the increasing numbers of reinforcements being called for.

Lord Louis Mountbatten left for his new post in the Far East and his place was taken by Robert Laycock, by now a Major-General.

The new Commando organisation that emerged was to see much action between 1943 and 1945. In many assault landings Commandos provided the spearhead, but increasingly they were required to stay in the line fighting as, and alongside, conventional infantry, a role for which they were by now properly organised and equipped.

Commando training. Volunteers for Commando service undergo training in the use of the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger at the Commando Basic Training Centre, Achnacarry. (IWM)

The 1st Special Service Brigade (renamed 1st Commando Brigade in late 1944) landed on the Normandy beachhead on D-Day, 6 June 1944, to link up with the British 6th Airborne Division and hold the eastern flank of the British lodgement. This they did against severe pressure from the German forces until withdrawn to England after 83 days. In January 1945, the 1st Commando Brigade was back in Europe helping to stem the German Ardennes offensive. In March the Brigade spearheaded the crossing of the River Rhine at Wesel, pushing on to capture Osnabrück in April and crossing the River Weser against fierce opposition. The river crossings of the Alter and Elbe were next to be seized by the Commandos, who had fought their way through to the Baltic by the time of the German surrender. In doing so they had undertaken the assault crossings of five river lines. The 1st Commando Brigade remained on occupation duties until its disbandment in 1946.

The 2nd Special Service Brigade saw its service in the Middle East. Formed in late 1943, its units were engaged in Italy, the Adriatic, the landings at Anzio, and in operations in Yugoslavia and Albania. In early 1945 No.2 Commando Brigade was concentrated in northern Italy, where they fought in the Lake Comácchio battle and the action that followed until the general surrender of the enemy forces. The Brigade served on in the area until disbanded in 1946.

The 3rd Special Service Brigade sailed for the Far East in late 1943 and saw action there against the Japanese in Burma. In January 1945, by now the 3rd Commando Brigade, they fought to help secure the Myebon peninsula and Kangaw, where they held a key position against a succession of determined attacks. The Brigade was then withdrawn to India to prepare for the Allied invasion of Malaya, but the abrupt ending of the war occasioned by the dropping of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki cancelled these warlike preparations. Instead, the Commandos sailed for occupation duties in Hong Kong. In 1946 the Army Commandos of the Brigade were disbanded and the formation was retitled as a Brigade of Royal Marine Commandos.

Sergeant Tom Durrant, No.1 Commando. Sergeant Durrant was aboard one of the motor launches fortunate enough to get away from St Nazaire, but unlucky enough to run into a German destroyer. The battle that followed was an unequal affair in which the badly wounded Durrant continued to man the launch's twin-Lewis guns until he collapsed. He was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross – the first ever awarded to a soldier for a naval action, and on the recommendation of an officer of the German destroyer. (IWM)

The 4th Special Service Brigade was formed in 1943 from four Royal Marine Commandos. The Brigade began to land on the Normandy beaches on D-Day and joined the 1st Special Service Brigade in the defence of the eastern flank of the British lodgement. They were involved in the fighting on this flank for over two months before crossing the River Seine at the end of August.

In October, the Brigade began amphibious training for the assault upon the island of Walcheren, in the Scheldt estuary. This was carried out in November by the Royal Marines, assisted by No.4 Commando. The winter of 1944/45 was spent assisting in the defence of the British positions north of the Scheldt and in the

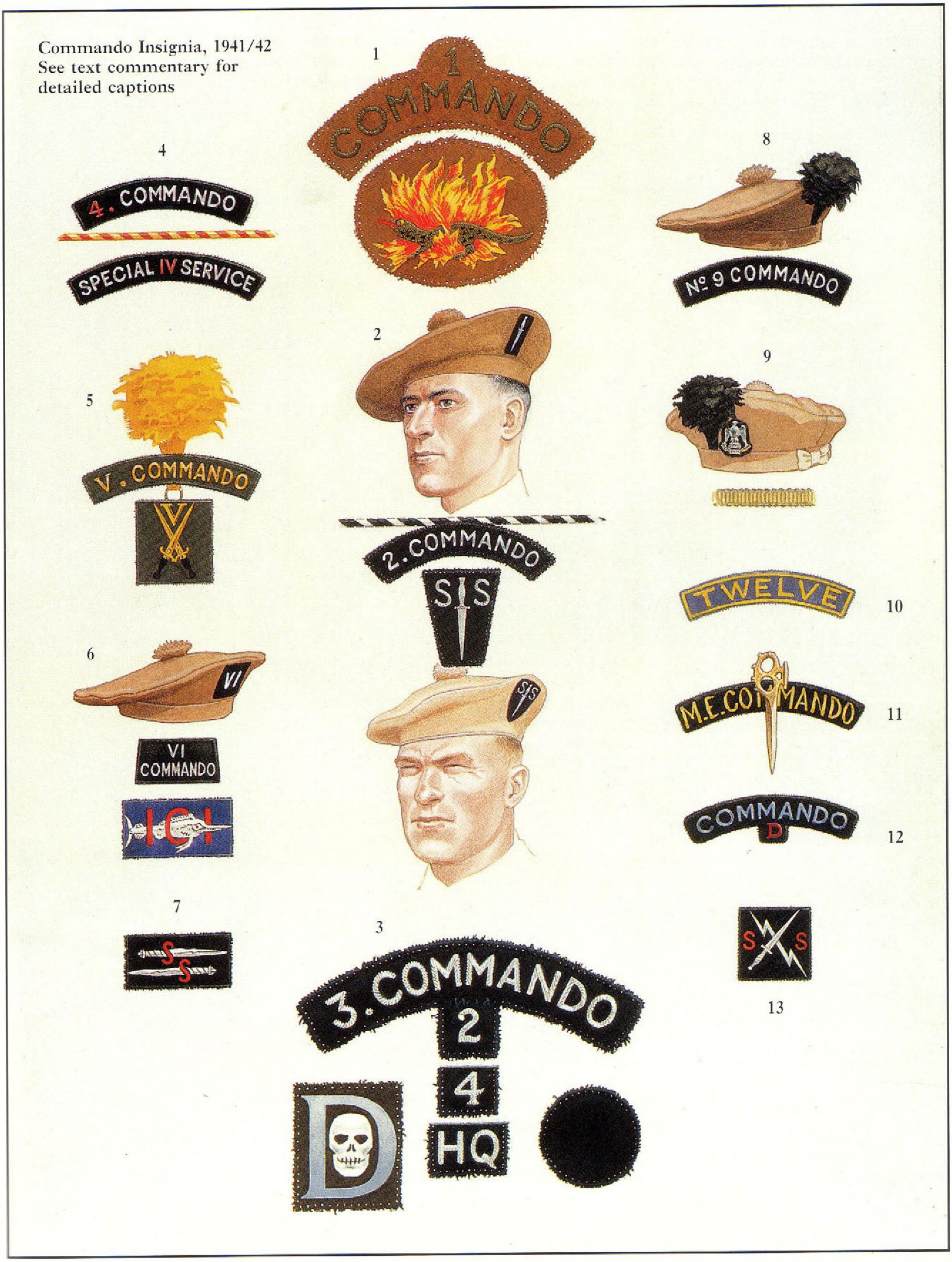
The Dieppe raid, August 1942. In this desperate affair the official photographic coverage went as awry as the plans for the battle. Little remains other than the German coverage of the aftermath. Here British landing craft approach Dieppe. The Commandos involved in this raid landed far beyond the headlands overlooking the port. (IWM)

line of the River Maas. It was here that No.4 Commando Brigade served until the German surrender. After occupation duties in Germany the Brigade returned to the United Kingdom and was disbanded in 1946.

The decision to disband the Army Commandos had been communicated to the men of the 1st Commando Brigade by none other than Maj.Gen. Robert Laycock, who told them:-

'It has fallen to my lot to tell you, the Commandos, who have fought with such distinction in Norway and the islands of the north, in France, in Belgium, in Holland and in Germany, in Africa and in Egypt, in Crete and Syria, in Sicily and Italy, on the shores and islands of the Adriatic, and in the jungles of the Arakan and Burma... with great regret... that you are to be disbanded.'

In most of the countries that the General mentioned, his Commandos had fought as infantry, albeit with the courage and dynamism expected of an elite. But it was, perhaps, the period from 1940 to 1942 when their exploits lifted the spirits of their nation more than any other. It was as bold and reckless raiders that the Commandos were portrayed then, an image that endures as a testimony of the esteem in which they continue to be held.


Commando Insignia, 1941/42
See text commentary for
detailed captions

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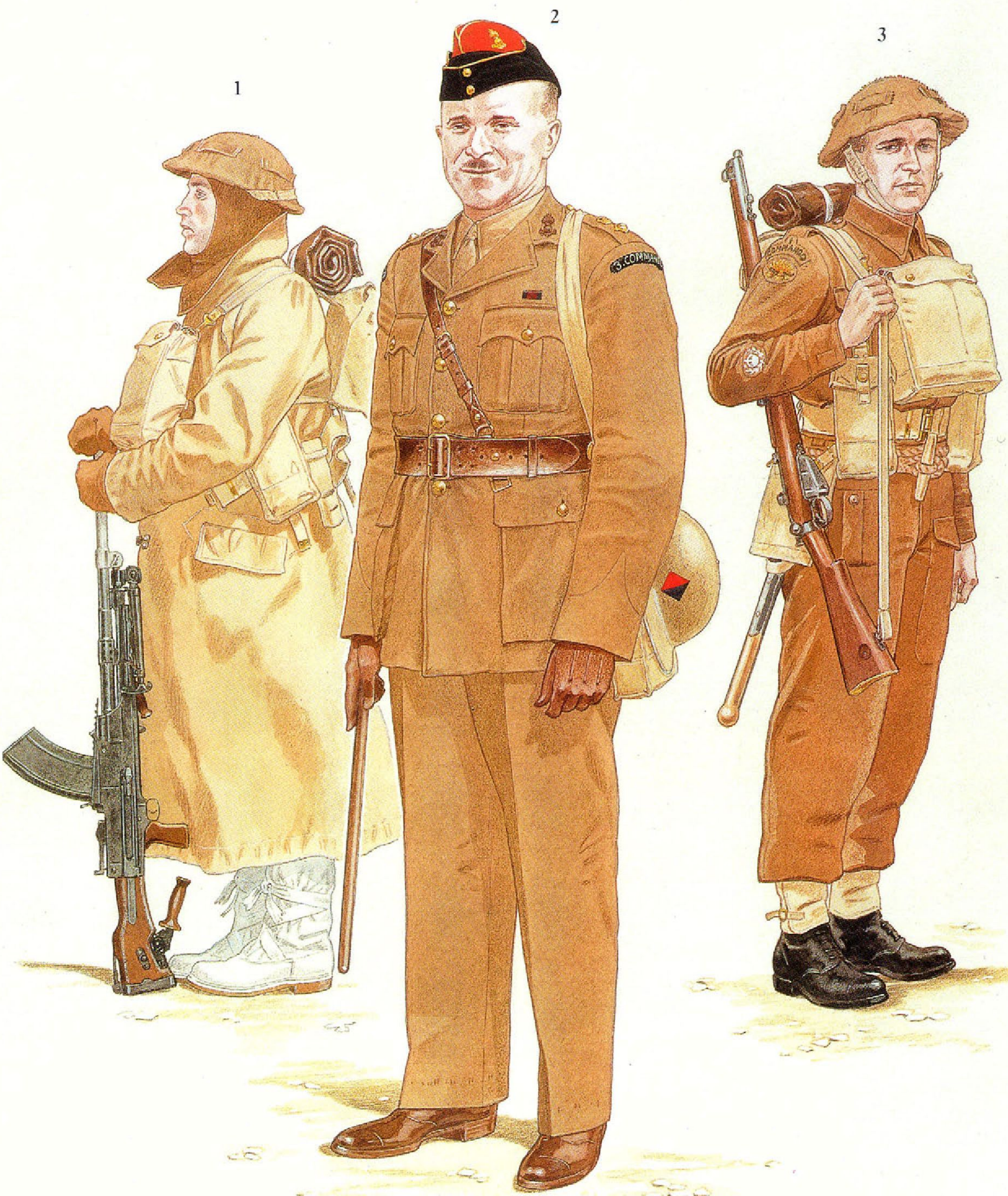
Origins, 1940/42
1: Independent company machine-gunner, 1940
2: Lt.Col. Durnford-Slater, No.3 Commando
3: Troop Sergeant Major, No.1 Commando, 1941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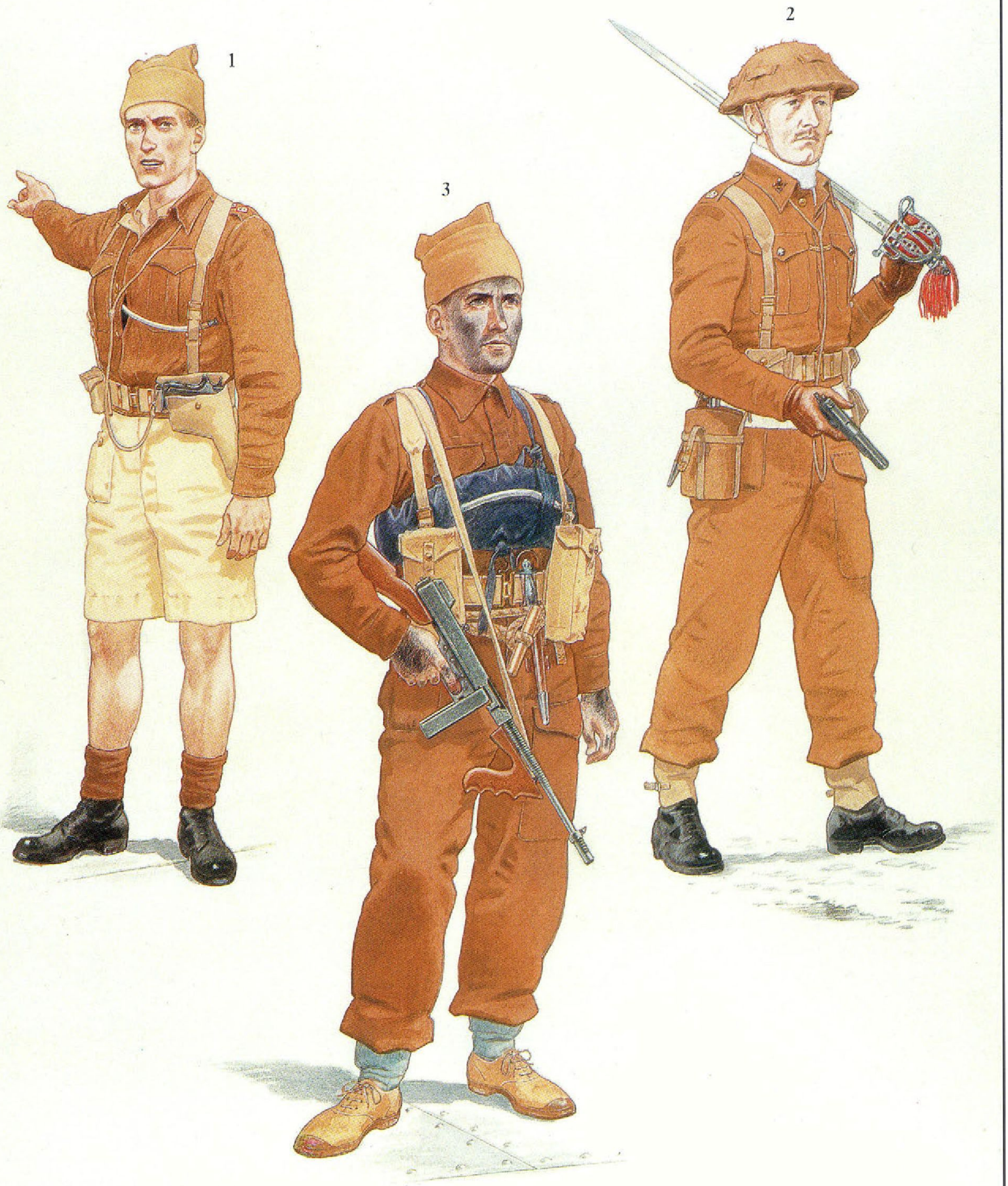
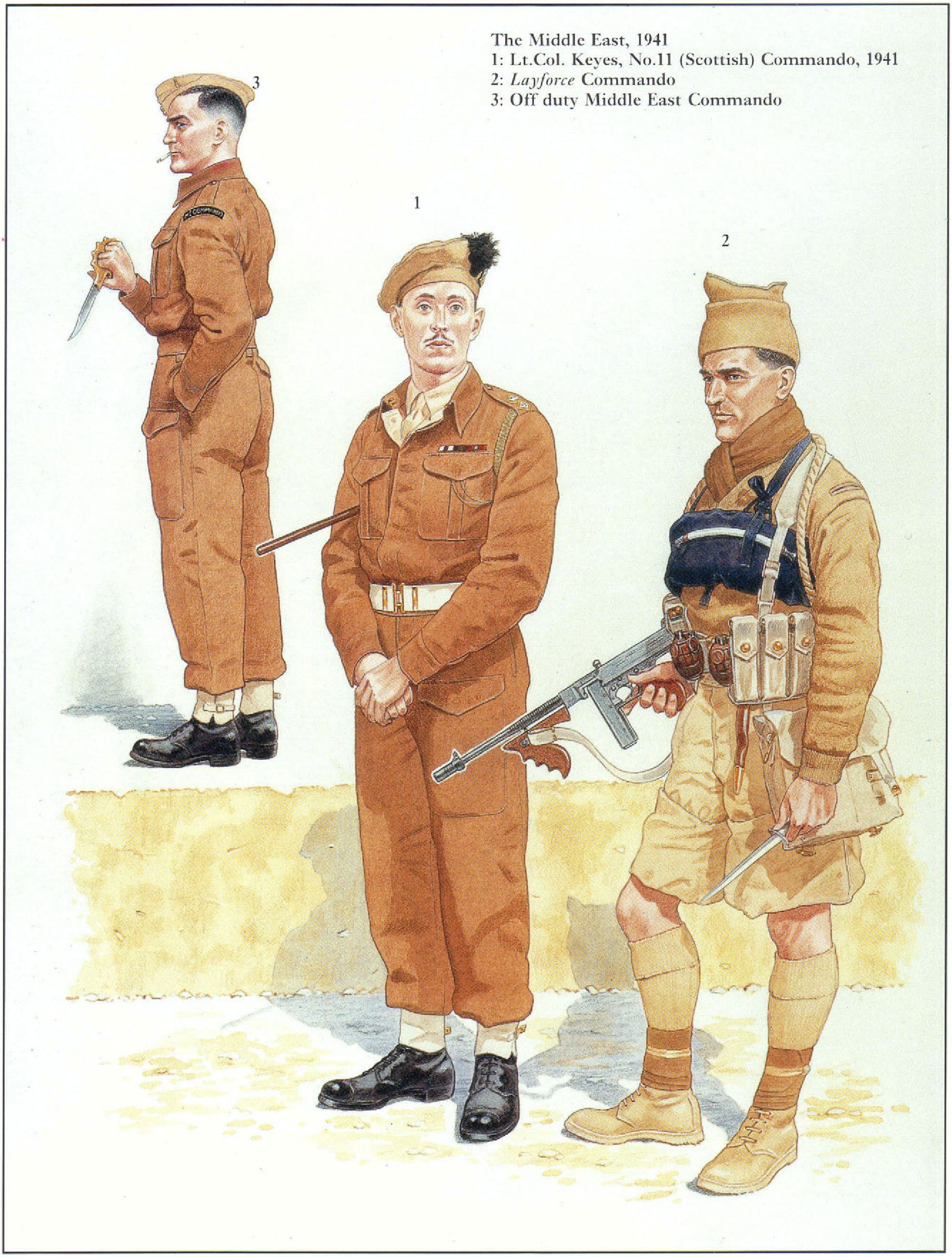
Raiding, 1940/1942
1: Lieutenant, No.6 Commando, 1942
2: Major Jack Churchill, No.3 Commando, 1941
3: Commando raider, 1940

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The Middle East, 1941
1: Lt.Col. Keyes, No.11 (Scottish) Commando, 1941
2: *Layforce* Commando
3: Off duty Middle East Commando

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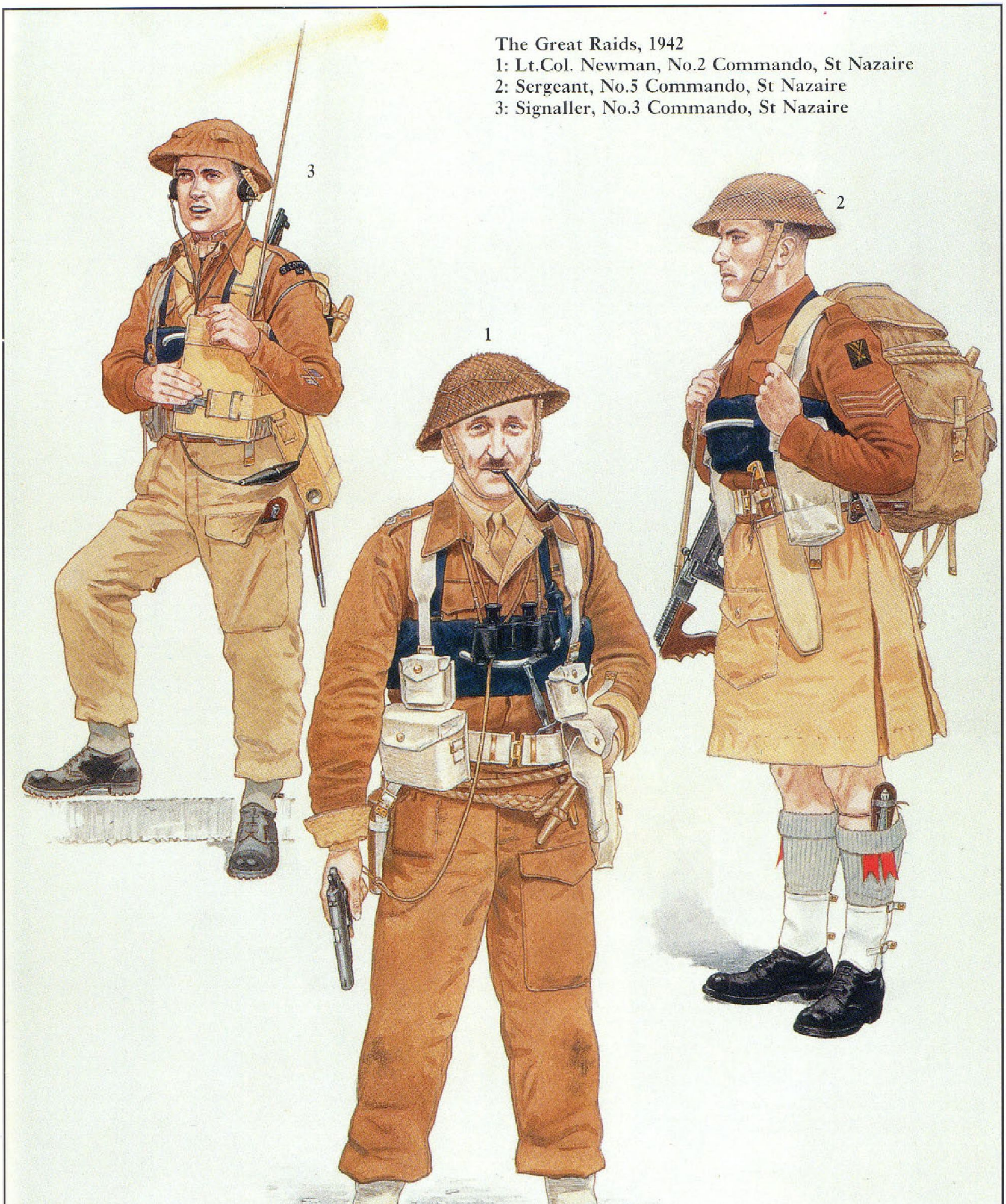
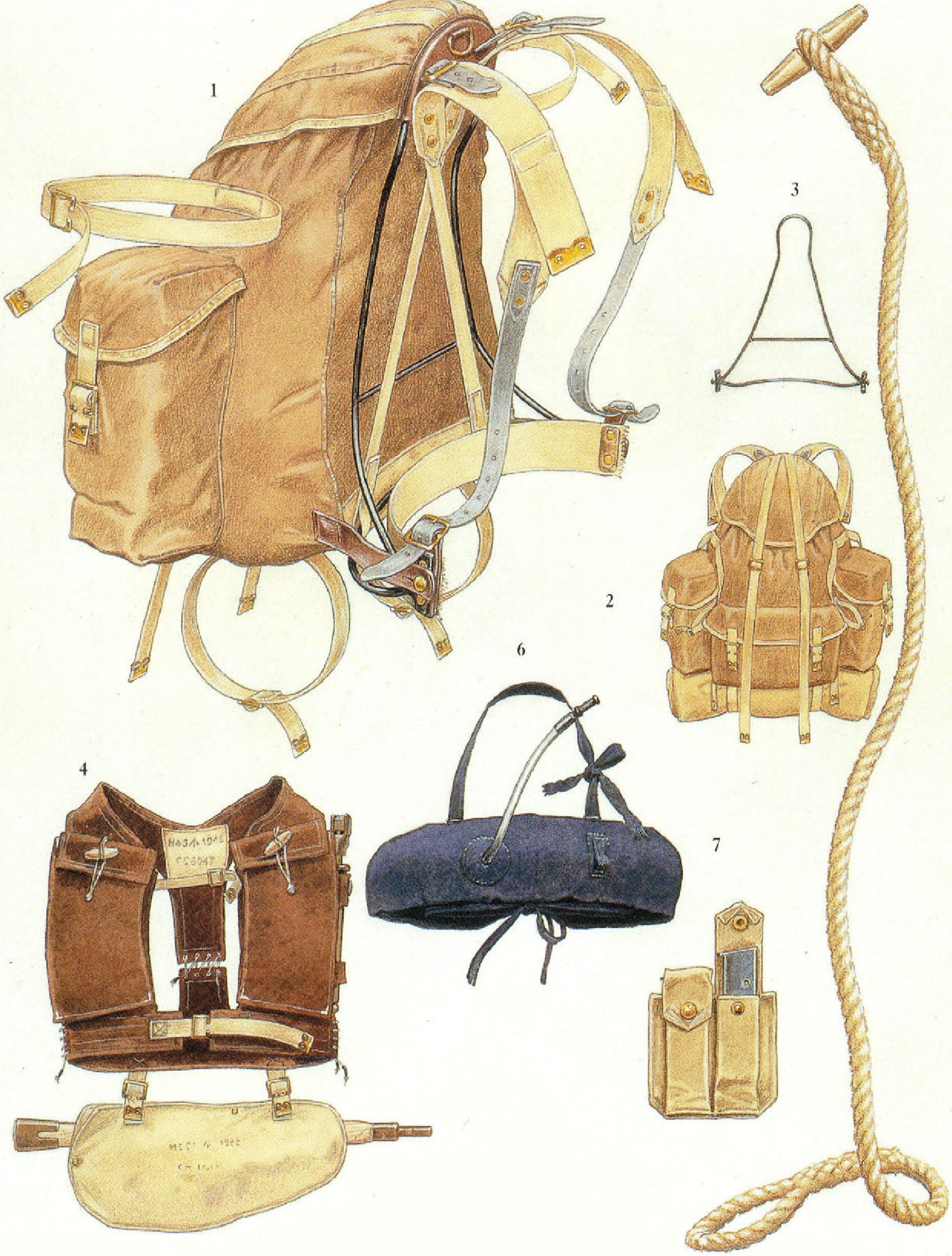


The Great Raids, 1942
1: Lt.Col. Newman, No.2 Commando, St Nazaire
2: Sergeant, No.5 Commando, St Nazaire
3: Signaller, No.3 Commando, St Nazaire

Commando Equipment
See text commentary for detailed captions



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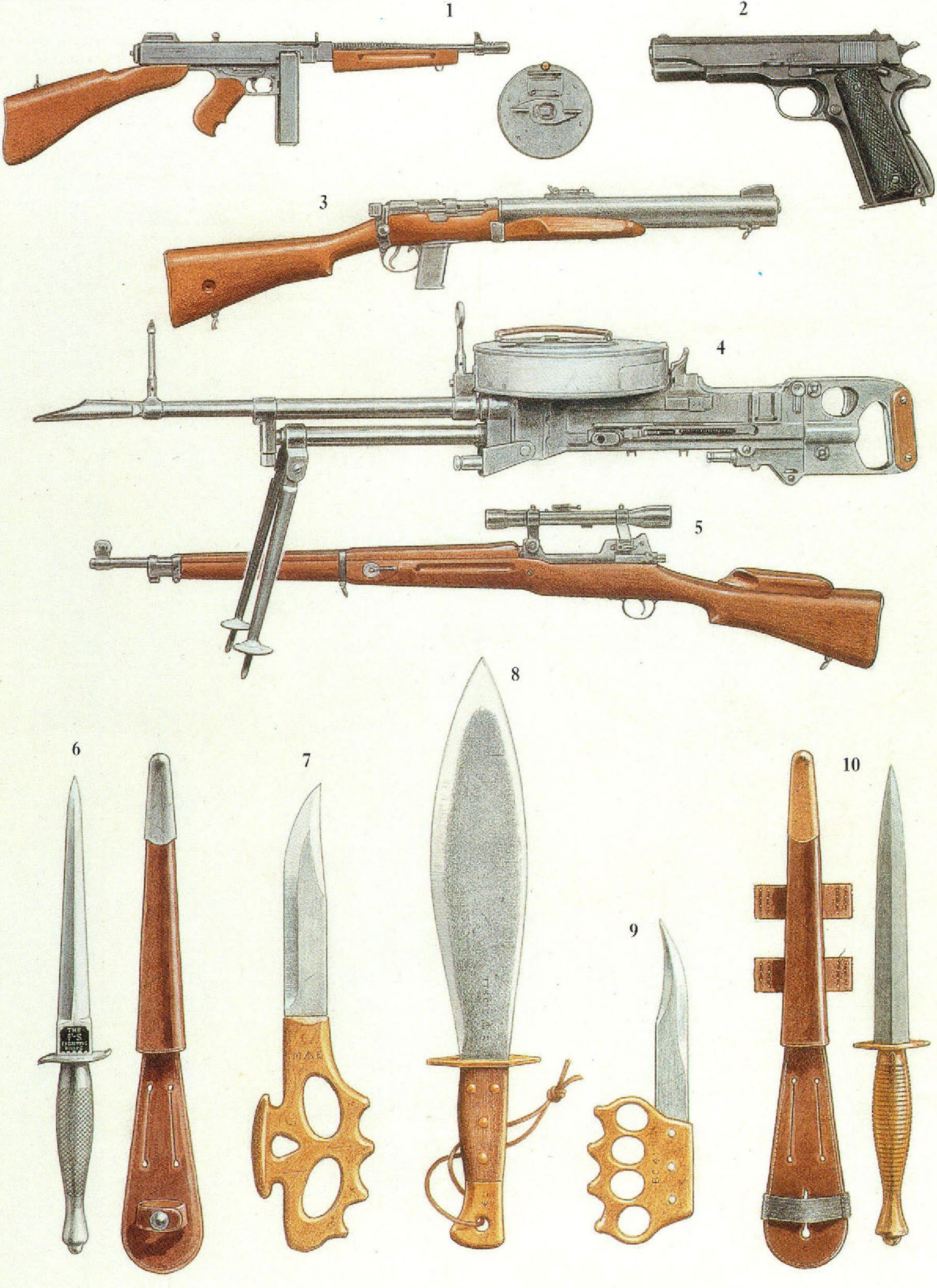
Commando Weapons
See text commentary for detailed captions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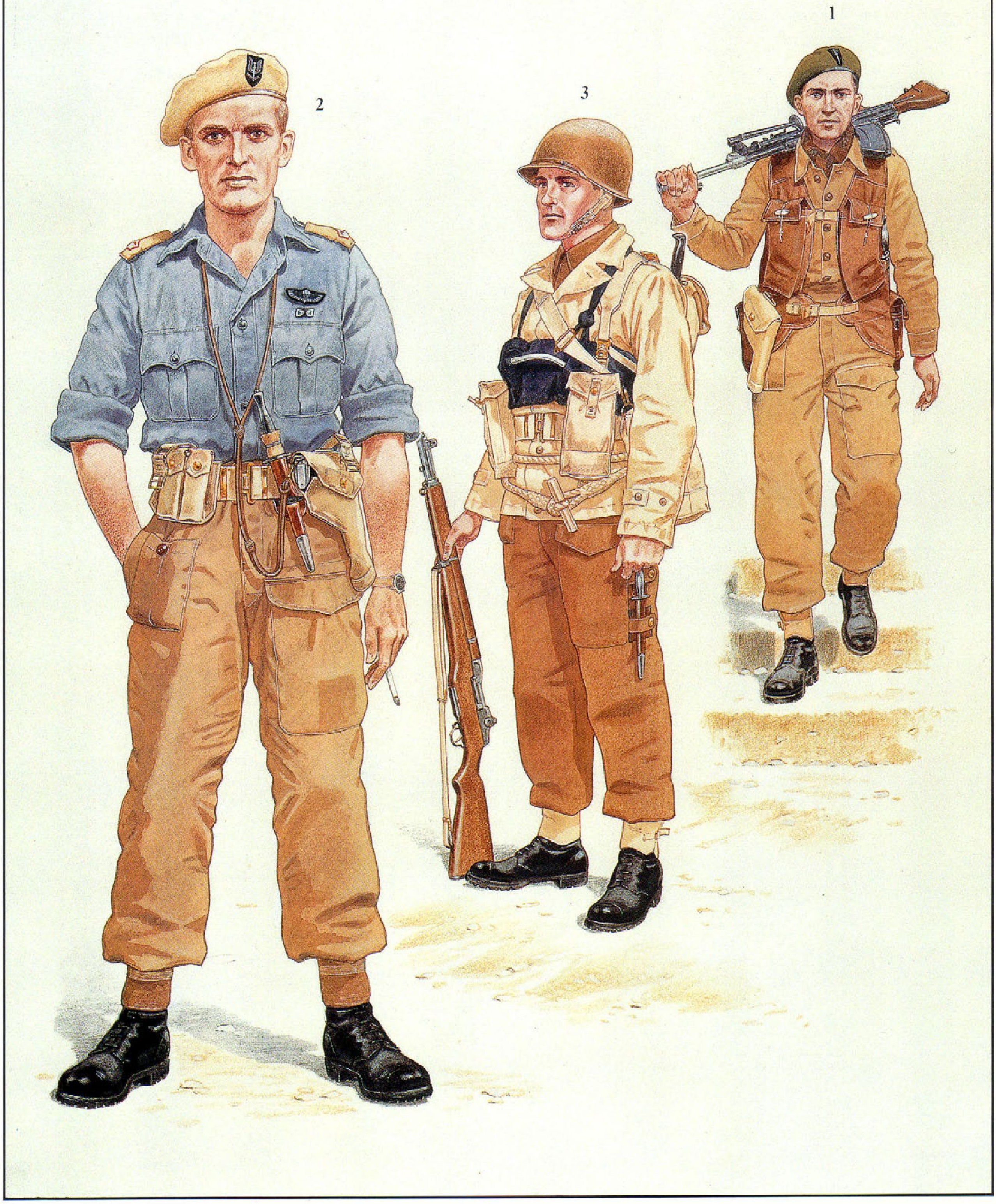
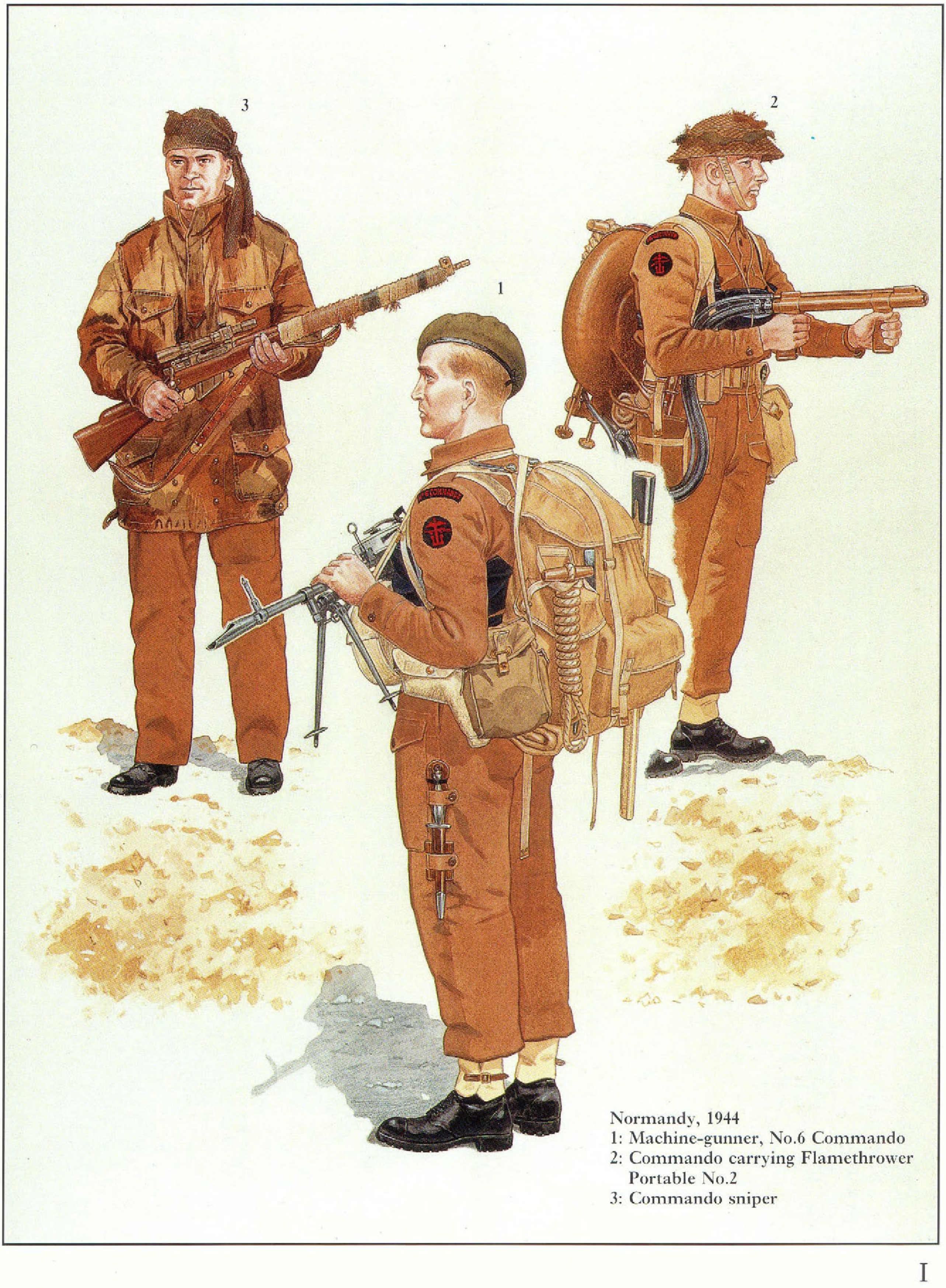
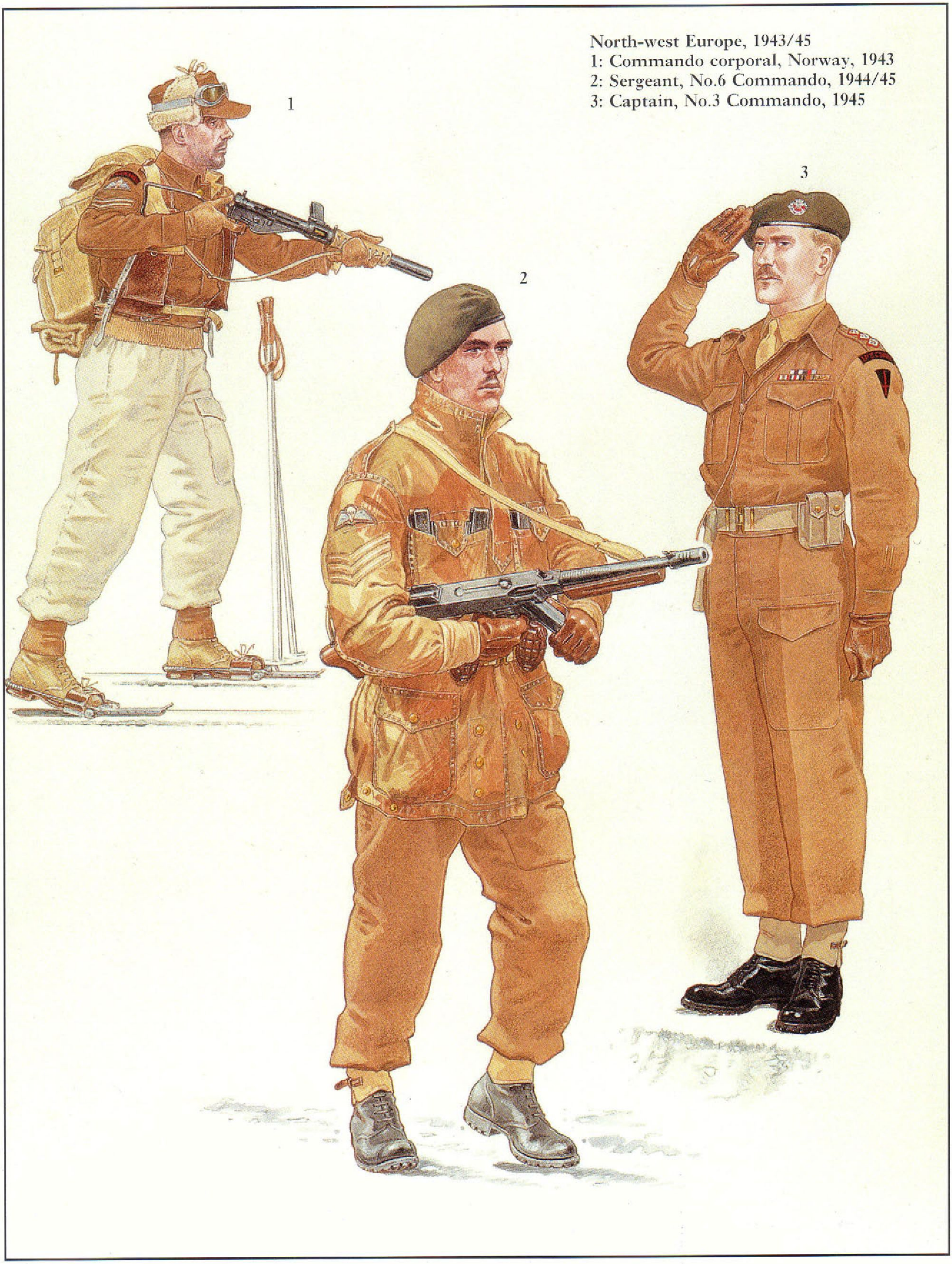
The Middle East 1942/45
1: Light machine-gunner, No.2 Commando, 1944
2: Major A. Lassen, S.B.S., 1945
3: Commando soldier, No.6 Commando, 1942





Normandy, 1944
1: Machine-gunner, No.6 Commando
2: Commando carrying Flamethrower Portable No.2
3: Commando sniper



North-west Europe, 1943/45
1: Commando corporal, Norway, 1943
2: Sergeant, No.6 Commando, 1944/45
3: Captain, No.3 Commando, 1945

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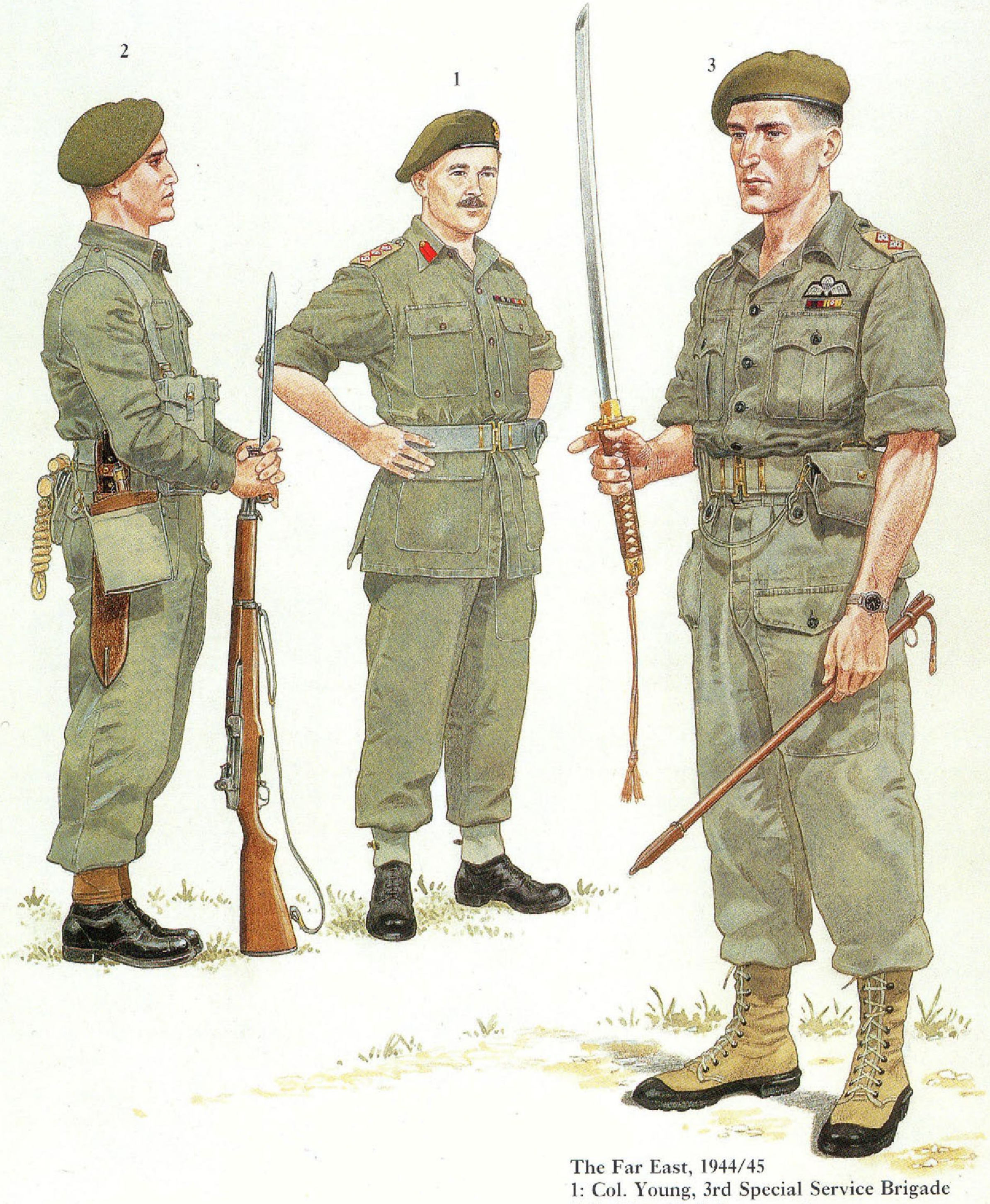
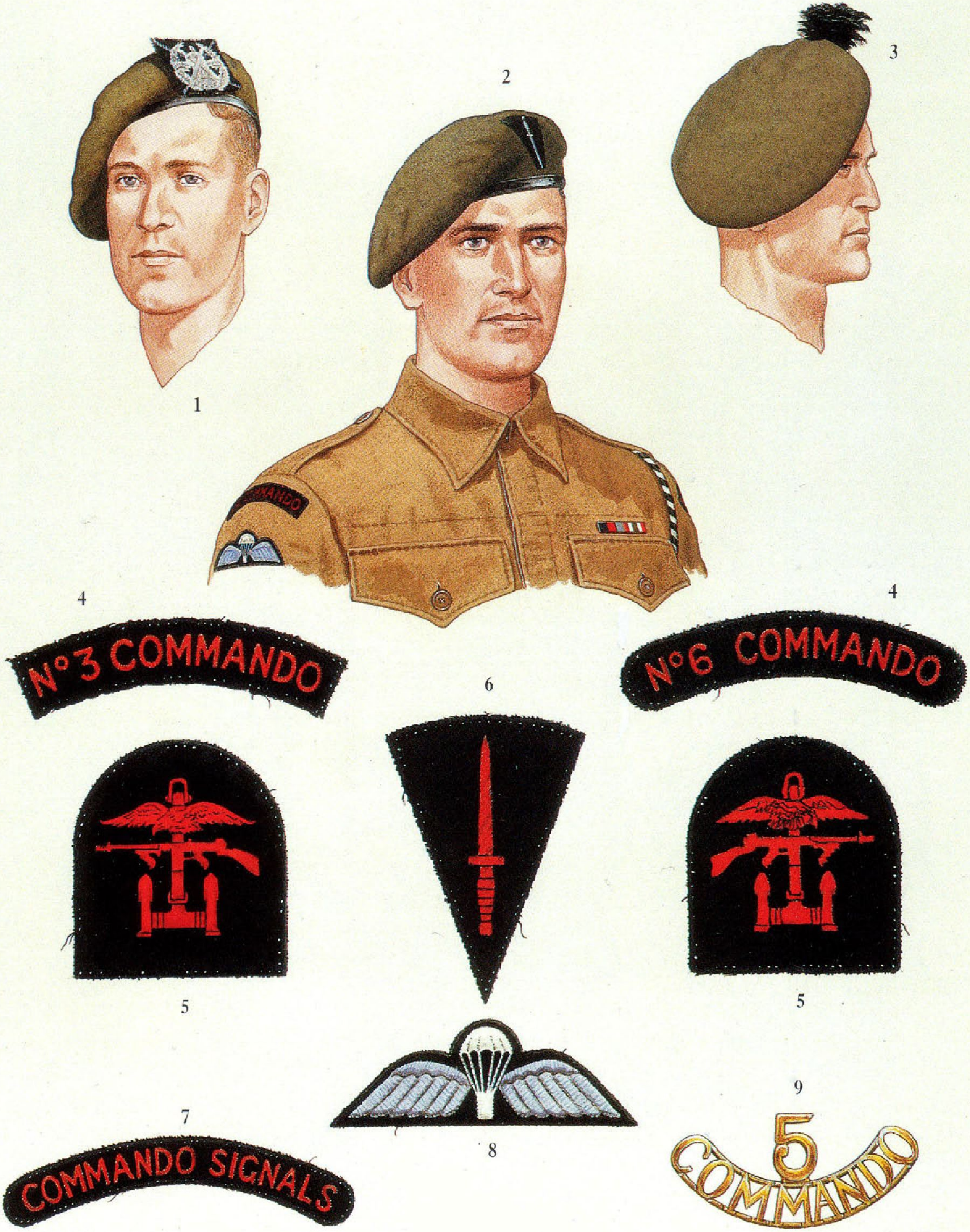


The Far East, 1944/45
1: Col. Young, 3rd Special Service Brigade
2: Soldier, No.2 Commando
3: Lieutenant, S.B.S.

K

Commando Insignia, 1943/45
See text commentary for detailed captions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APPENDIX

A rare photograph of No.4 Commando landing on the right flank of the main assault on Dieppe. The Commando, under the leadership of Lord Lovat, pulled off a copybook operation, destroying the battery it was directed against in a pincer attack from the front and to the flank. (IWM)

Commando units

No.1 Commando

Formed in the summer of 1940 from men of the Independent Companies and supplied personnel for airborne forces. Found parties for cross-channel raiding and spearheaded the *Torch* landings in North Africa in November 1942. The rest of its active service was in the Far East. Amalgamated with No.5 Commando. Disbanded in 1946.

No.2 Commando

Formed in the summer of 1940 from men of the Independent Companies and re-formed after the original No.2 Commando became parachute troops. Re-formed again after the losses of the St Nazaire raid, the Commando went to the Mediterranean, where it fought in Sicily, Italy and Yugoslavia. Disbanded in 1946.

No.3 Commando

Formed in July 1940 from volunteers for Commando service, No.3 Commando had the distinction of conducting one of the first raids. It took part in the raids on the Lofotens, Vaagso and Dieppe. In 1943 No.3 Commando fought in Sicily and Italy before returning to Britain for the landings in Normandy, the Rhine Crossing, and the pursuit to the Elbe. Disbanded in 1946.

No.4 Commando

Formed in July 1940 from volunteers for Commando service, No.4 Commando provided detachments for raiding before the Dieppe raid. It was next in action on D-Day and in the fighting that followed. Later, No.4 Commando fought at Walcheren. Disbanded in 1946.

No.5 Commando

Formed in July 1940 from volunteers for Commando service. Personnel from No.5

Captain Pat Porteus, No.4 Commando. At Dieppe, Captain Porteus led a bayonet charge through the wire and into the battery position at Varengeville. After a desperate fight to capture the guns he finally fell, wounded through both thighs. For his gallantry he was awarded the Victoria Cross. (IWM)

Commando participated in cross-Channel raiding before the unit landed in Madagascar in 1942. It was next in action in Burma in 1944 and 1945. Amalgamated with No.1 Commando and disbanded in 1946.

No.6 Commando

Formed in the summer of 1940 from volunteers for Commando service. The first major battles No.6 Commando took part in were the *Torch* landings in November 1942, when it landed near Algiers with US forces, and in the fighting that followed. Returning to Britain for the D-Day landings, No.6 Commando later took part in the fighting that saw the crossings of the Juliana canal, the River Rhine, River Weser and River Elbe. Disbanded in 1946.

No.7 Commando

Formed in August 1940 from volunteers for Commando service, it formed part of *Layforce* in 1941. After the battle of Crete the survivors of No.7 Commando were dispersed and the unit disbanded.

No.8 Commando

Formed in the summer of 1940 from volunteers for Commando service – mostly from the Brigade of Guards. In early 1941 No.8 Commando formed part of *Layforce* and fought on Crete. Those survivors who returned to Egypt were dispersed and the unit disbanded.

No.9 Commando

Formed in mid-1940 from volunteers for Commando service and men of the Independent Companies. After operating from Gibraltar, No.9 Commando went on to fight in the Italian campaign, in Greece and in the Aegean. Disbanded in 1946.

No.10 (Inter-Allied) Commando

In August 1940 attempts to raise a No.10 Commando from the troops in Northern Command met with a poor response and those volunteers that had come forward were posted to other Commandos.

In early 1942 an Inter-Allied Commando was formed which eventually grew to include a Free French Troop, a Dutch Troop, an 'X' or 3rd Troop of men from eastern European countries, a Belgian Troop, a Norwegian and Danish Troop, a Polish Troop, a Yugoslavian Troop, and a further troop of Free Frenchmen. Although commanded by a British lieutenant-colonel their amazing record forms no part of the story of the British Army Commandos. It is sufficient to salute their courage and their achievements in battle, both alongside their British comrades and in the clandestine operations and raids they carried out behind enemy lines.

No.11 (Scottish) Commando

Formed in June 1940 from volunteers for Commando service from Scottish Command. In

Men of No.4 Commando disembarking at Newhaven after returning from the Dieppe raid. In their midst is one of the Germans taken prisoner during the action. This Commando wore denim battledress and 'caps, comforter' in preference to the heavier serge uniforms and steel helmets. (IWM)

early 1941 the Scottish Commando became part of *Layforce*. It was disbanded in Cyprus in the late summer of 1941, with some of its men joining the Middle East Commando.

No.12 Commando

Formed in Northern Ireland in early 1941 from volunteers for Commando service. The first action in which the whole of No.12 Commando took part was the diversionary raid on the Lofotens on 26 December 1941. Men from the Commando participated in a number of other raids, but numbers dwindled and the unit was disbanded in December 1943.

No.14 Commando

Formed in 1943 for raids into Arctic Territory. After an abortive raid on Norway the unit was disbanded.

No.30 Commando

Formed in 1941, the unit had three sections, No.33 Royal Marine, No.34 Army and No.36

Royal Navy, all of which underwent the Commando basic training. The unit's purpose was intelligence-gathering, and to this end personnel from the sections of No.30 Commando (later called the 30th Assault Unit) operated with forward troops to seize the materials as the object of their mission, and to carry out the necessary interrogations.

No.50 Commando

Formed in the Middle East in late 1940 from volunteers for Commando service from units in Egypt and Palestine. Shortly after formation the Commando was amalgamated with No.52 Commando and incorporated into *Layforce* as D Battalion. After the battle of Crete its survivors returned to Egypt and D Battalion was disbanded.

Two of the legendary figures of the Commando story converse on the quayside at Newhaven after the Dieppe raid. The tall officer is Lord Lovat, who had led No.4 Commando in the attack on the Varengeville battery. The officer in service dress is Brigadier Robert Laycock – the one-time leader of Layforce, *then commanding the Special Service Brigade, and later to become Chief of Combined Operations. (IWM)*

No.51 Commando

Formed from Palestinian volunteers in 1940, this Commando fought against the Italians in Abyssinia and Eritrea before being absorbed into the Middle East Commando.

No.52 Commando

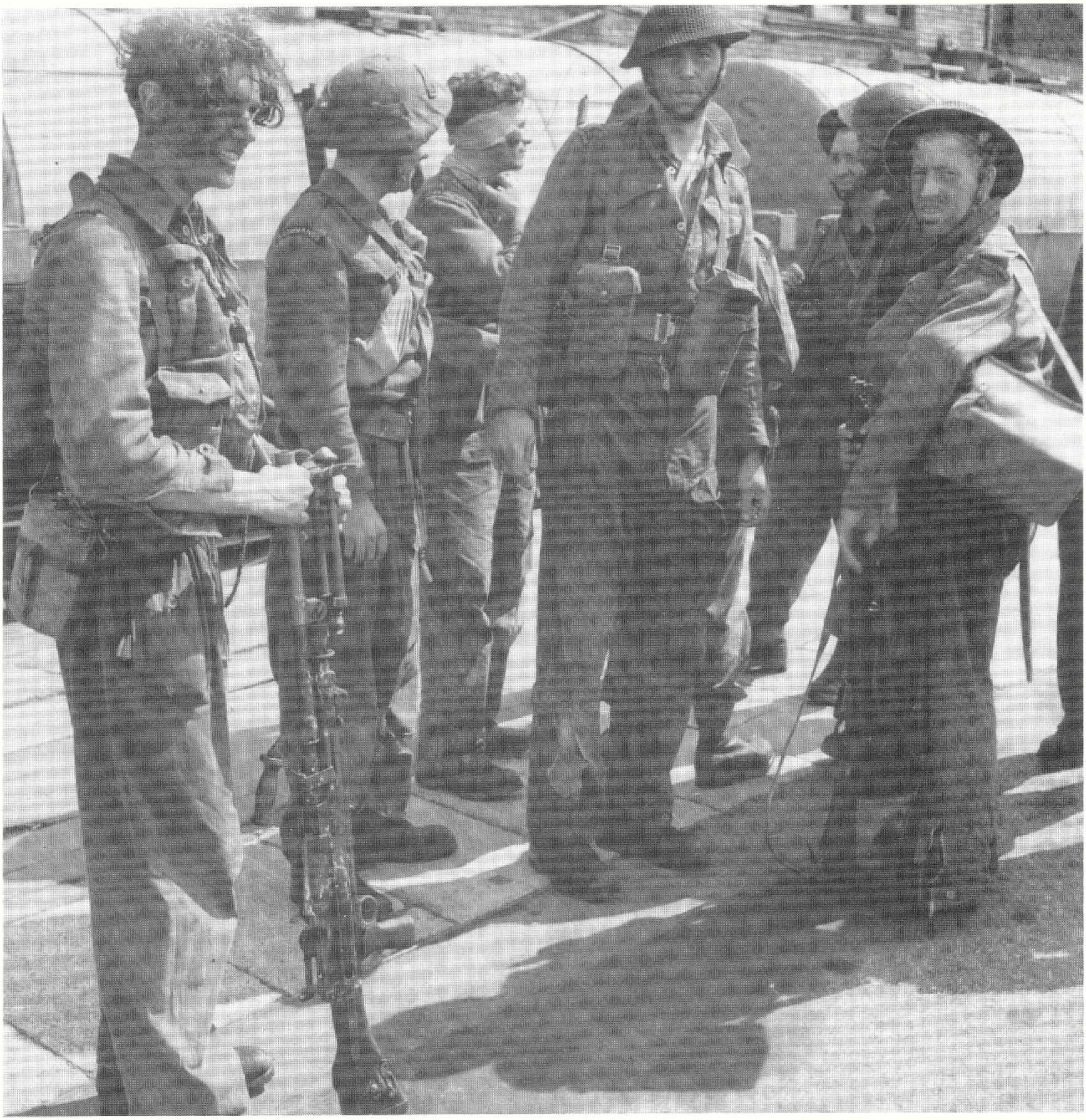
The record of this Commando is identical to that of No.50 Commando.

The Middle East Commando

Formed from the remnants of *Layforce*, etc. to placate Winston Churchill's demand for the re-formation of raiding forces in the Middle East. The Middle East Commando was disbanded in 1942.

No.62 Commando

Formed in 1941 around a group of commandos operating under the auspices of S.O.E. This unit was also known as the Small Scale Raiding Force (SSRF). Its first operation was in early 1942 with the seizing of an Italian liner, a German tanker, and a yacht from a Spanish colonial port off the coast of West Africa. This 'cutting out' expedition from a neutral harbour had severe political repercussions, but the unit remained in existence, growing to a strength of 55 officers and men and carrying out cross-Channel raids. These enjoyed mixed fortunes – one bringing back valuable codebooks and seven German prisoners from Les Casquets lighthouse, with the next losing 11 raiders including No.62 Commando's CO. A raid on Sark in October included five men from No.12 Commando and left behind the bodies of a number of German soldiers who had been killed or wounded after being captured and bound. This incident, following others of a similar nature, resulted in a German order that British and Canadian prisoners taken at Dieppe were to be similarly bound. Shortly afterwards Hitler issued orders that all captured Commandos were to be executed. In early 1943 No.62 Commando was disbanded and its personnel dispersed, some going to the S.B.S. in the Middle East. Amongst these was Anders Lassen, destined to win the Victoria Cross at Lake Comácchio.



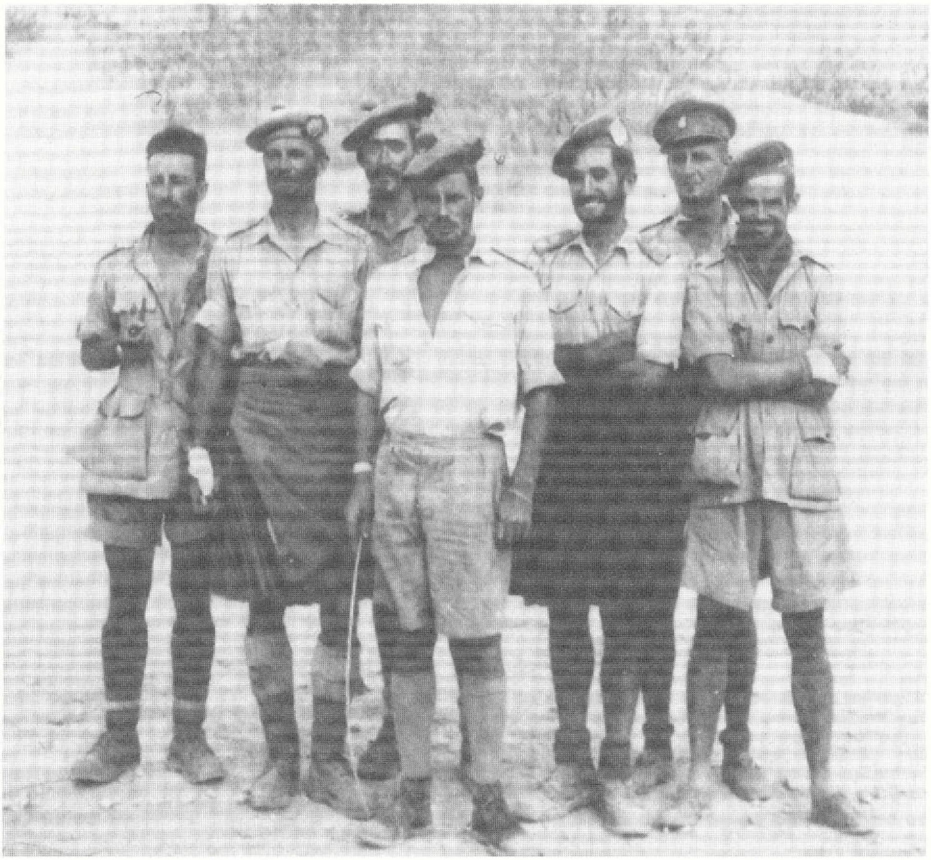
Men of No.3 Commando photographed on the quay at Newhaven after the Dieppe raid. Several wear the '3. COMMANDO' shoulder titles, one man with the legend 'HQ' beneath his. Unlike No.4 Commando they had gone to Dieppe with steel helmets. All are wearing the rubber-soled boots designed for Commandos. (IWM)

The Special Boat Section

This unit, derived from 101 Troop of No.6 Commando, carried out a number of small-scale raids and reconnaissances across the Channel and in the Mediterranean from 1941 onwards, usually from two-man canoes which were launched from submarines. Later, S.B.S. detachments operated from a variety of surface craft, especially the Greek schooners called caiques. S.B.S. groups also operated in the Far East.

Raiding Forces Middle East

Formed in late 1943 to co-ordinate the activities of the Long-Range Desert Group, Special Boat Section, 1st Special Raiding Squadron and others



In September 1942 the Middle East Commando took part in their last operation – a raid on Tobruk. Whilst Royal Marines (Force A) landed from the sea, Commando Force B travelled across the desert to their target in the vehicles of the Long Range Desert Group – a voyage of 2,000 miles. The raid went disastrously wrong. The Royal Navy lost a number of ships, including a cruiser, and only 90 Royal Marines returned. Force B were trapped within enemy lines and destroyed, only three men returning. The photograph above is of Commando officers of Force B on the outward journey, three of whom were still wearing the Balmoral bonnets and black hackles of No.11 (Scottish) Commando. (IWM)

in the Aegean, Adriatic, and later in Italy. Many of these units had Commando origins, and in their methods of operating they followed the original Commando concept of seaborne raiders. They carried out nearly 400 operations, tying down six enemy divisions in the Aegean alone. One of their most spectacular coups was the kidnap of the German General Kreipe, commanding the Axis forces on Crete, in April 1944.

Northforce and Timberforce

Formed at various times in 1943 and 1944 from men of No.12 and No.14 Commandos for raids and reconnaissances on Norway.

THE PLATES

A: Commando insignia, 1940–42

Until the adoption of the green beret, standardised titles and the Combined Operations badge in 1942, the Commandos devised their own insignia, a selection of which is shown here. (A1) Shoulder title and sleeve patch of No.1 Commando. The patch depicted a salamander being consumed in the flames of a fire. (A2) No.2 Commando was one of those which adopted Scottish headdress for all ranks. Illustrated are the 'other ranks' bonnet badge, lanyard, shoulder title, sleeve patch and officer's bonnet badge, which had the letters 'S.S.' (Special Service) in addition to the silver dagger of the O.R.s. (A3) No.3 Commando adopted the shoulder title shown with troop numbers, or 'H.Q.' below.

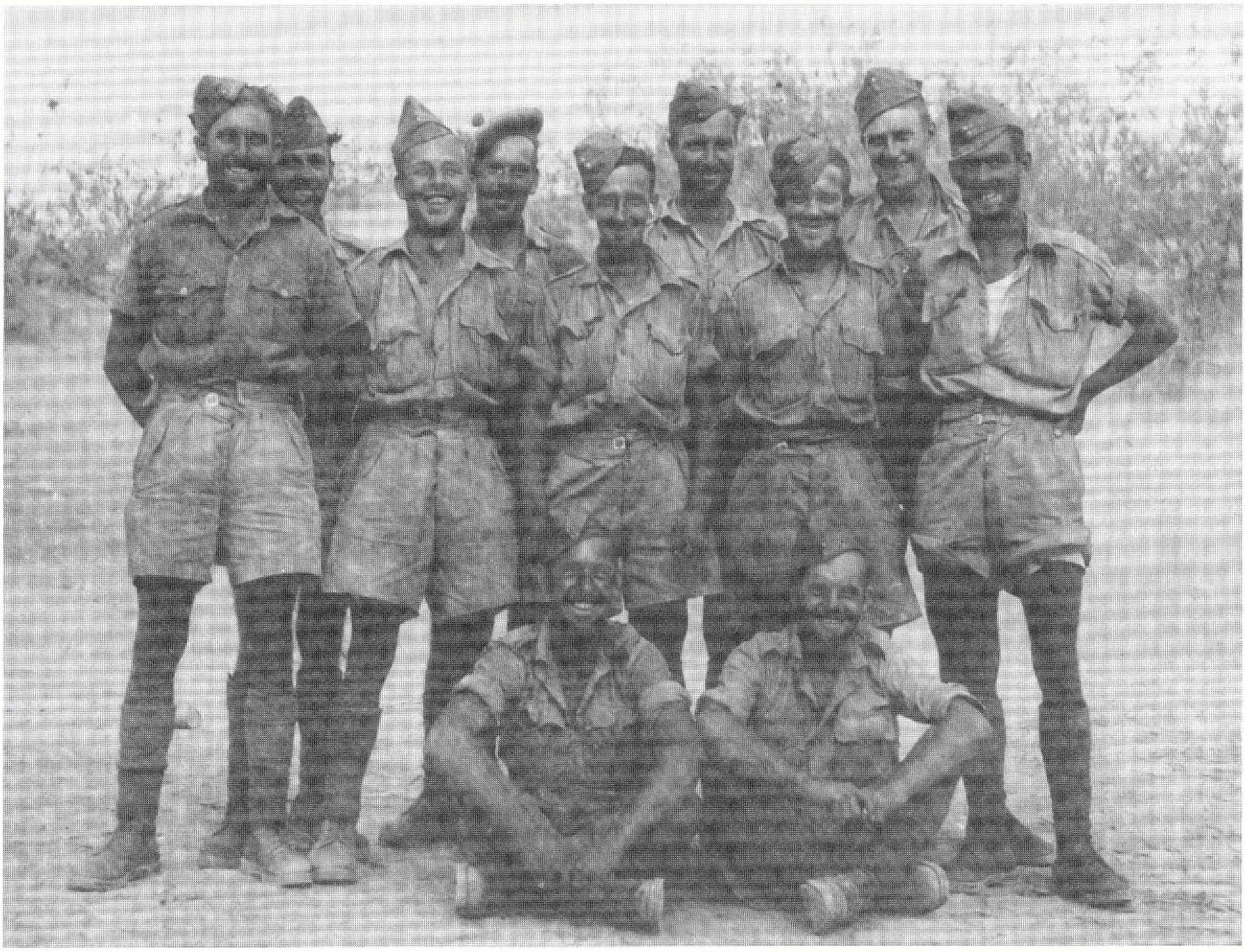
Troop patches were also worn – those shown being of the early D Troop and the disc of No.5 Troop. (A4) Shoulder titles and lanyard of No.4 Commando. (A5) Feather hackle, shoulder title and sleeve patch of No.5 Commando. (A6) No.6 Commando was another which adopted the 'Tam o'Shanter' bonnet, shown here with the 'VI' bonnet badge, an early 'slip-on' title and the sleeve patch of 101 Troop, pioneers of small boat operations. (A7) Sleeve patch of the Special Service Brigade headquarters personnel. (A8) No.9 Commando were another 'T o'S' unit. Shown here is the black hackle, adopted as a unit badge, and the Commando's shoulder title. (A9) No.11 Commando, the 'Scottish Commando', retained the 'T o'S' worn by most of the men who formed it, but adopted a black hackle as a unit badge. A green lanyard was also worn.

Photographs taken in 1941 and 1942 show regimental badges being worn, with and without the hackle. (A10) Shoulder title, No.12 Commando. (A11) The fortunes of the Commandos in the Middle East are described in the text. Little is known of their insignia, other than the shoulder title and 'knuckleduster knife' badge shown and known to have been worn. (A12) Shoulder title, Commando Depot. (A13) Sleeve patch, Signal troop, Special Service Brigade.

B: Origins, 1940–42

At the time of their formation, the Independent Companies and Commandos wore the standard battledress and equipment of the British Army. Officers and men were supposed to continue wearing the headdress and insignia of their parent regiments and corps, but soon adopted shoulder titles and sleeve badges to mark their new role. Several Commandos took to wearing the Scottish infantryman's 'Tam o'Shanter' bonnet, sometimes with a unit badge or hackle. Eventually, such individuality was crushed by the introduction of the green beret and uniform insignia. The Independent Companies who went to Norway in early 1940 were issued with the cold weather clothing devised for the North Russian expedition of 1918/19. Figure B1 is

Another group from Force B, Middle East Commando. (IWM)



On D-Day and the battles that established the Normandy beachhead, the Commandos played their part, fighting alongside the infantry of the assault formations and the airborne troops who had spearheaded the invasion. By this time the Commandos' raiding days were behind them, and they fought as conventional infantry units. Here, men of an Army Commando march to their port of embarkation and the ships that will carry them to Normandy. All carry Bergen rucksacks and wear the green beret. (IWM)

an Independent Company soldier muffled against the Arctic cold in a sheepskin-lined coat and 'Shackleton' boots in addition to his helmet and 1937-pattern webbing equipment. His weapon is a .303-inch Bren machine-gun.

Credited with raising the first Commando was Lt.Col. J.F. Durnford-Slater (B2). He wears the shoulder title of his No.3 Commando, and the Field service cap and dress of a gunner officer. On his breast is the ribbon of the Distinguished Service Order he won at Vaagso.

Figure B3 is a Troop Sergeant Major of No.1 Commando, 1941. He wears the standard battledress of a British infantryman of the time. Note his 1937-pattern webbing equipment 'battle order', respirator, anti-gas cape, entrenching tool, toggle-rope and No.1 rifle. Note also his shoulder title, shoulder patch and badge of rank.

C: Raiding, 1940–42

Within a short space of time the Commandos adapted or dispensed with items of uniform and equipment that interfered with their role as seaborne raiders. Steel helmets were replaced by woollen 'caps, comforter', and anti-gas equipment was left in billets with packs and other equipment not needed for 'butcher and bolt' operations. The Thompson submachine-gun, a .45-inch calibre weapon with a high rate of automatic fire, was the favoured Commando weapon – and a variety of knives and clubs were carried. Blackened faces and rubber-soled gym shoes aided stealth. Inflatable life-belts from naval stores were invariably worn, and every man carried a toggle-rope. A typical raider (C3) is depicted in this form of dress in the centre.

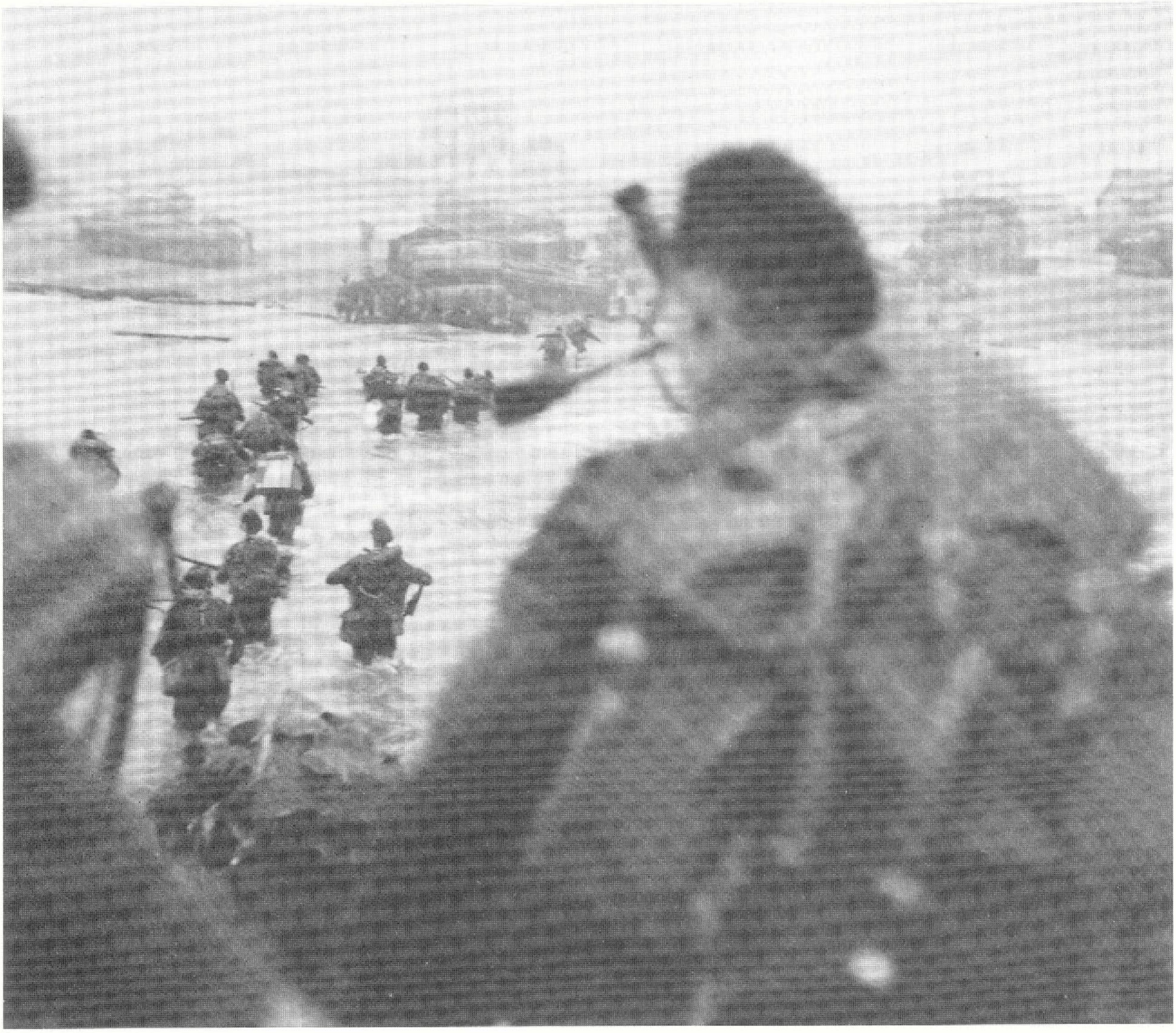
A variation of 'raiding order' (C1). In this case a Lieutenant of No.6 Commando returning from a raid on France 3/4 June 1942. The bulky appearance is due to the life-belt being worn beneath the battledress blouse. Note his shorts and and .45-inch Colt automatic pistol. (This weapon used a common ammunition to the Thompson. It became the standard Commando sidearm.)

On the right is Major Jack Churchill (C2), Second-in-Command No.3 Commando, on Maaloy Island, December 1941. Churchill is reputed to have piped his men into the assault as their landing craft ran in to the island and then led them ashore brandishing a 'claymore' sword. Note the Major's Fairbairn-Sykes knife, Colt pistol and officer's 1937-pattern webbing set.

D: The Middle East, 1941

Layforce and the Middle East Commando enjoyed

One of the best-known photographs of Commando troops shows Lord Lovat's 1st Special Service Brigade headquarters wading ashore on the Normandy beaches, 6 June 1944. Nearest to the camera is Lovat's piper. Brigadier the Lord Lovat is the figure in the water nearest the piper's shoulder. (IWM)



Inland from the D-Day beaches Commandos of the 1st Special Service Brigade move off towards their rendezvous with the units of the 6th Airborne Division. (IWM)

a fairly short history before their survivors went back to parent regiments or into other Special Service units such as the Special Air Service, the Special Boat Section, etc., eventually to be incorporated into the Raiding Force, Middle East. This organisation carried out raiding in the eastern Mediterranean in 1943 and 1944 and fought alongside No.2 Commando Brigade in northern Italy in 1945.

Lt.Col. Geoffrey Keyes (D1), No.11 'Scottish' Commando, in 1941. Colonel Keyes lost his life during an abortive raid on Rommel. He was subsequently awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. On his battledress the Free French Croix de Guerre he had recently won in Syria, along with that of the General Service medal for pre-war service in Palestine with the Royal Scots Greys. He wears the badge of this, his regiment, on his Balmoral bonnet, beside the hackle of No.11 Commando. His green lanyard is also a mark of the Scottish Commando.

A Commando of *Layforce (D2)* is depicted in raiding order. Note the familiar life-belt, toggle-rope, Thompson submachine-gun and Fairbairn-Sykes knife. Note also the 'Bombay bloomer' shorts, jersey pullover and scarf worn to ward off the desert night's cold. Note further his rope-soled boots, Thompson magazine pouches and the No.36 grenades worn on his waistbelt. His 1937-pattern webbing includes a haversack and water-bottles.

On the left, an off-duty member of the Middle East Commando (D3) examines one of the several patterns of knuckle-duster knives issued to this unit. His cap badge is a reproduction of such a knife. Note his shoulder title.

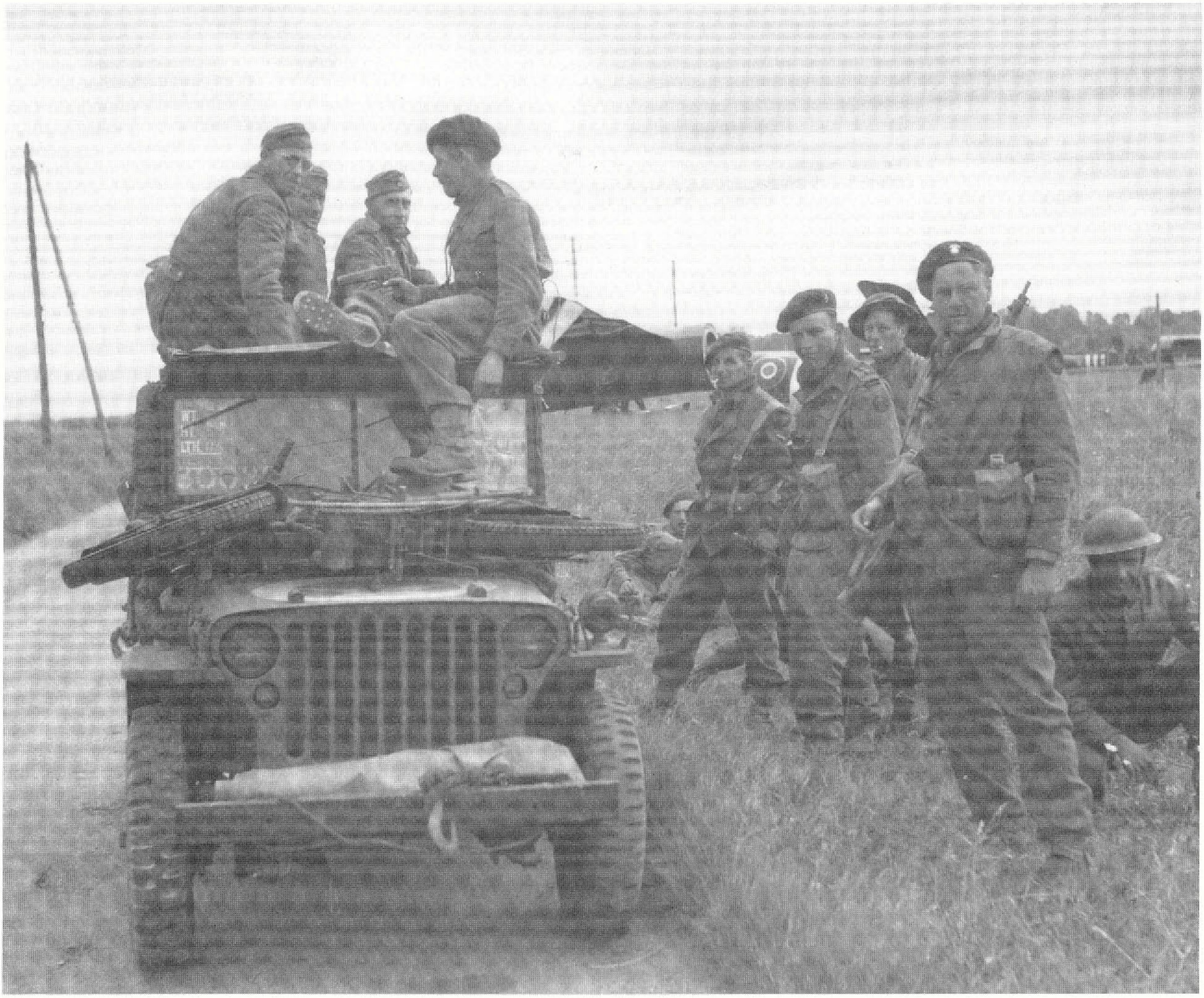
E: The Great Raids, 1942

Leading the Commando force at St Nazaire was Lt.Col. A.C. Newman (E1), Essex Regiment and No.2 Commando. For his leadership and conduct at St Nazaire, Col. Newman was awarded the Victoria Cross in June 1945. He is shown in battledress and the equipment worn on amphibious raids. This includes the 1937-pattern officer's set, naval-pattern life-belt and a toggle-rope. Binoculars, a Colt .45 automatic pistol and a Fairbairn-Sykes knife are also carried. All insignia other than badges of rank were ordered to be removed before the St Nazaire raid, and webbing was scrubbed 'white' as an aid to identification.

A Sergeant of No.5 Commando (E2) prepared to embark for St Nazaire. A demolition party from this Commando was amongst those supporting Lt.Col. Newman's men on the raid, and a number of these went into action wearing the kilt. Photographs of survivors as prisoners of war show that not all the No.5 Commando group removed their 'V' patches. An apron is worn over the kilt, and his Bergen rucksack contains explosives, fuse and detonators. Note the naval life-belt, scrubbed webbing, Thompson submachine-gun, 'Roman sword' and the Fairbairn-Sykes knife tucked into his hosetop.

A signaller of No.3 Commando (E3) in the dress worn at Dieppe. He is operating a Wireless Set No.46, equipment which weighed over 30lbs, including the batteries and junction box carried in a pack on the operator's back. In its manpack role

The link-up between Commandos and airborne troops is effected. (IWM)



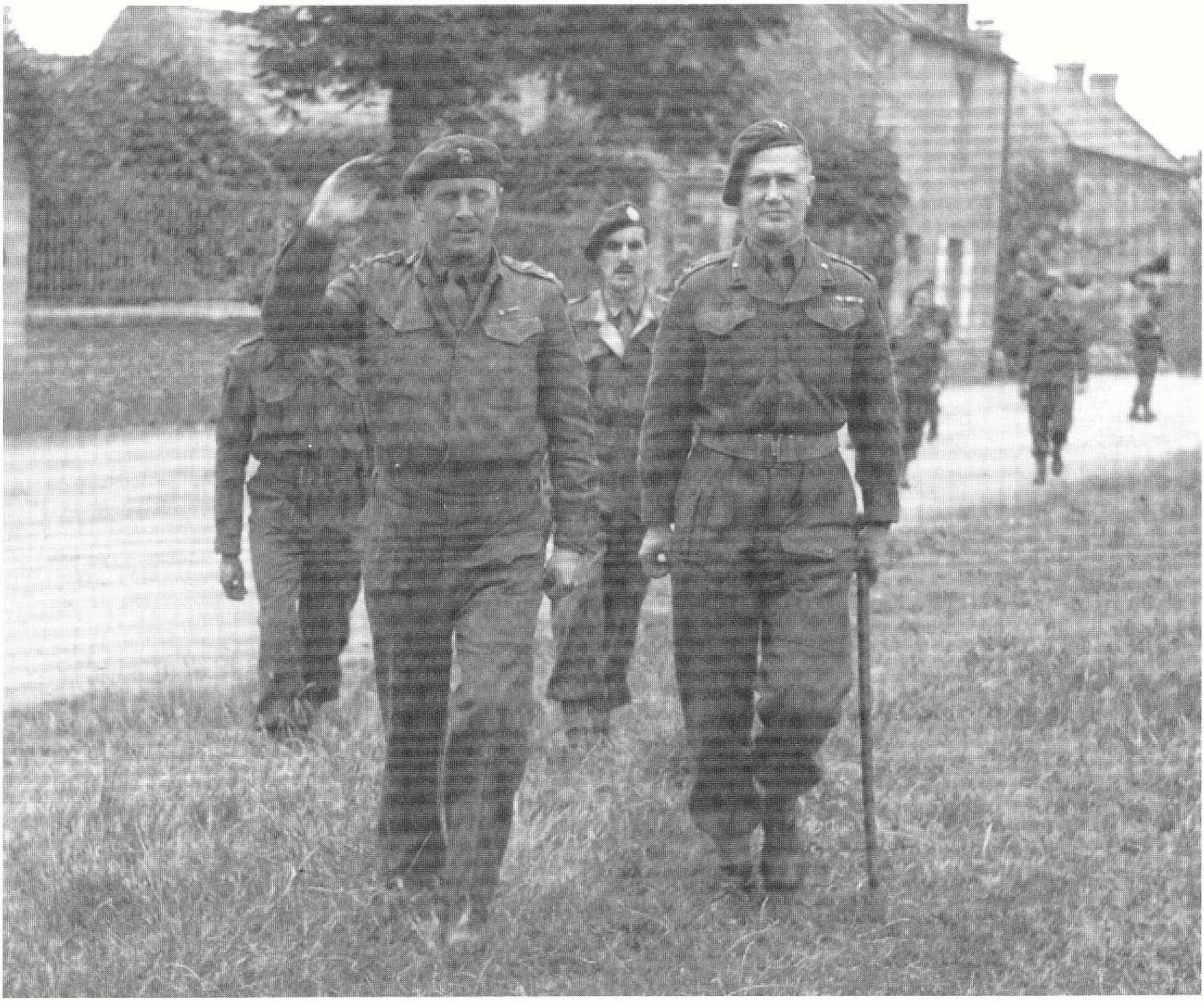
German prisoners-of-war being taken to the rear in a jeep ambulance. A Commando covers the enemy soldiers with a .45-inch calibre Colt automatic pistol, whilst a Commando captain and his men look on. In the background are some of the gliders in which men of the 6th Airborne Division landed on D-Day. (IWM)

the 46 set had a voice range of up to 4 miles, but rigged as a ground station it could reach far beyond this range, with suitable aerials and Morse transmitted on M.C.W. (Modulated Carrier Wave). Note the shoulder title and signaller's badge worn, the combination of battledress and denim overalls, the newly issued 'S.V.' rubber-soled boots and the hessian helmet cover. In addition to his radio equipment the signaller carries webbing, a No.1 rifle and bayonet, toggle-rope and a Fairbairn-Sykes knife.

F: Commando equipment

Commandos were the first users of the Bergen rucksack (F1), initially to carry demolition equipment on the early raids. The early Bergens acquired had chrome leather straps, but later manufacture utilised the webbing straps and buckles of 1937-pattern equipment.

The Bergen design came from Norway and featured a pear-shaped canvas bag with a drawstring at its neck. Over this went a flap. There were external pockets, and sets of straps for the attachment of loads (F2). The Bergen could carry a phenomenal amount of kit – its weight bearing down on the shoulders and hips of the wearer via a metal frame (F3), to which was attached the carrying harness. The Bergen could be extremely galling when worn over 1937-pattern webbing



equipment and a development of the 1942-pattern 'battle jerkin' was produced to alleviate this discomfort. The 'skeleton assault harness' (F4) enabled ammunition to be carried in its pouches, had a frog for a bayonet, and, in its second pattern, straps for the attachment of an entrenching tool.

The toggle-rope (F5) was carried by all Commandos to enable the instant assembly of lengths of rope for cliff-scaling, obstacle crossing etc. Going to battle by sea called for a serviceable lifebelt, and that issued to the Commandos was the British naval pattern – shown inflated (F6). Commandos were the main users of the American .45 Colt automatic pistol, for which a special pouch was issued to contain its seven-round magazines (F7).

Normandy, 14 July 1944. Two famous Commandos attend a Bastille Day celebration. Brigadier John Durnford Slater, left, deputy commander of the Special Service Group, could legitimately lay claim to having been the first Commando, in that he raised No.3 Commando, the first unit to bear the title 'Commando'. Brigadier Derek Mills-Roberts had been second-in-command to Lord Lovat at Dieppe, and assumed command of the 1st Special Service Brigade from him after Lovat was wounded on the 12th of June. Mills-Roberts led the Brigade from then until victory. (IWM)

G: Commando weapons

The Commandos utilised the full range of British infantry weapons, and were trained to use those of their enemies. Thompson submachine-guns (G1) and Colt automatic pistols (G2) were purchased from the United States from 1940 onwards and became the standard pistol and sub-

Normandy, 17 June 1944. Yet another legendary Commando officer briefs snipers for a mission. Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Young was at this time commanding No.6 Commando. One of the originals, Young took part in many of the early raiding operations and ended the war leading a Commando brigade. (IWM)

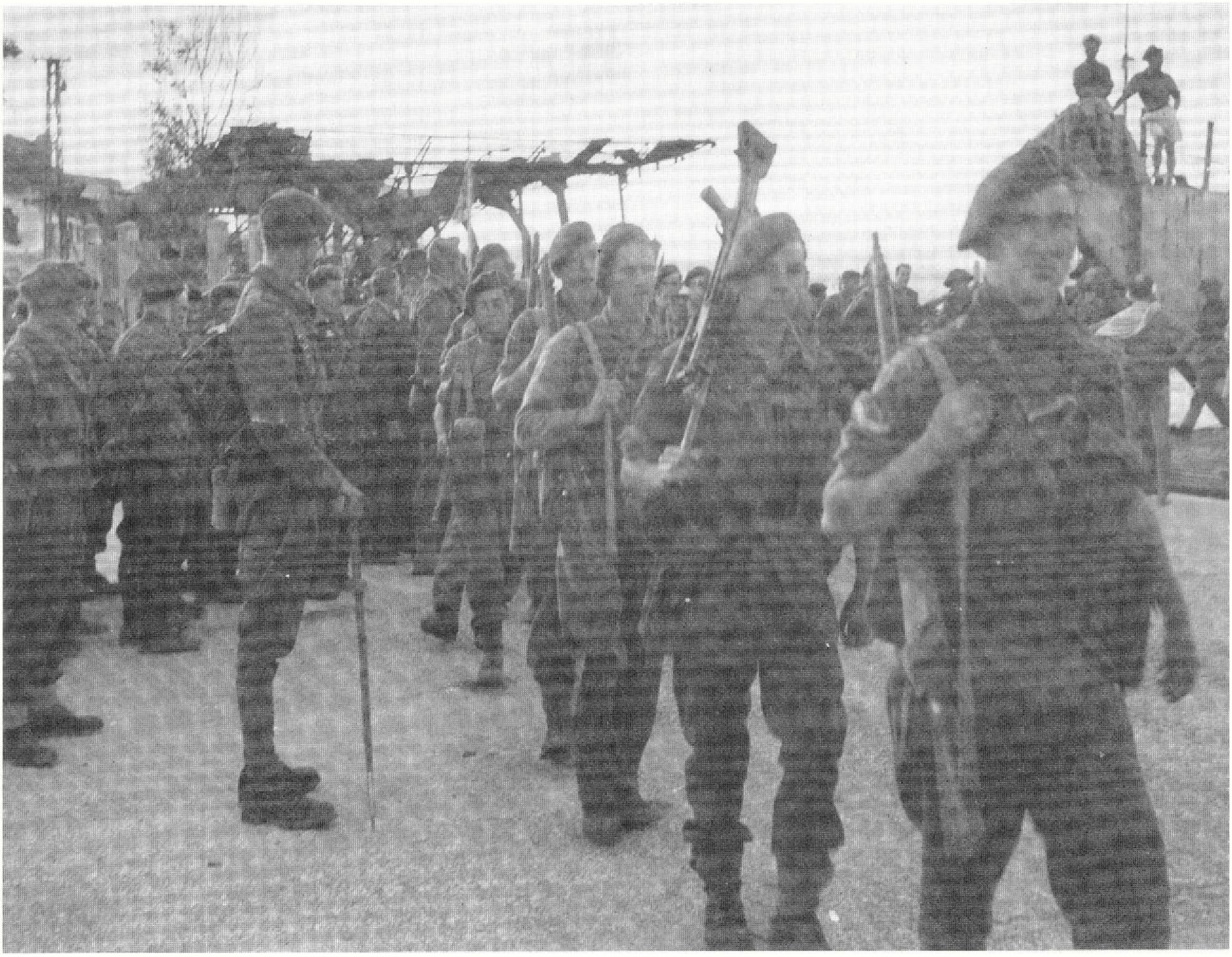
machine-gun of the Special Service troops throughout the war. The common .45-inch A.C.P. round limited the types of small arms ammunition carried by Commandos to two. (As opposed to the four carried by some British units.) The Thompson, or 'Tommy-gun', weighed 10½ lbs, and was fitted with either a 20-round box magazine or a 50-round drum magazine. Its cyclic rate of fire was 675 rounds-per-minute. The Colt 'auto' weighed 2½ lbs and had a magazine capacity of 7 rounds.

The 'De Lisle Commando carbine' (G3) also used the American .45 round. Comprising a modified Lee-Enfield action and a silencer with 13 baffles, the weapon permitted silent killing out to 400 yards. Another oddity was the .303-inch Vickers 'K' machine gun (G4) – originally used by the Royal Air Force for aerial combat. This weapon was used by Commando units in the Normandy landing and in the fighting that followed. With a rate of fire of over 1,000 rounds per minute and a magazine capacity of 96 rounds, the 'K' gun could produce a greater volume of fire than the standard Bren light machine-gun, but could not compete with the Bren's accuracy.

Commando units had a higher establishment of snipers than normal infantry battalions. Until No.4 sniper rifles became available in 1942, commando snipers used the 'Rifle, No.3 Mark 1* (T)' (G5), the venerable .303-inch Pattern-1914 rifle fitted with 3x magnification telescope.

There were many patterns of 'edged' weapons issued to Commandos, and they form a study in themselves. A few are illustrated here, including (G6) the Fairbairn-Sykes No.2 fighting knife, also called the 'Roman sword' or 'Smatchet' – a fearsome weapon, 16 inches long. Other fighting knives were the Fairbairn-Sykes 1st pattern (G7), the Middle East Commando knuckle-duster 'ordnance pattern' (G8), the 'BC41' knuckle-duster (G9) and a later-pattern Fairbairn-Sykes (G10). All were about 13 inches in length, except (G8) which was 8½ inches.

Normandy, June 1944. Commandos and airborne men interrogate captured German soldiers. (IWM)



The 2nd Special Service Brigade was formed in Italy in late 1943 and its units saw much fighting in the campaign there, especially at Anzio. Units of the Brigade also operated with the partisan forces in Yugoslavia, in Albania and in the Adriatic before returning to Italy for the closing battles of the war. Above are troops of No.2 Commando landing on the island of Corfu after capturing the port of Sarande in Albania. Most men are wearing assault jerkins in place of webbing equipment. Note the dagger badge of No.2 Commando worn on green berets. (IWM)

H: The Middle East, 1942–45

Landing in Algeria in November 1942 as part of an Anglo-American force, the men of No.6 Commando were issued with US Army uniforms and weapons in order to appear less provocative to the Vichy French with whom the British had clashed several times. The commando soldier (H3) wears an American helmet and field jacket and is armed with an M1 Garand rifle. Otherwise his uniform and equipment are British, including the familiar Fairbairn-Sykes knife, toggle-rope and 'S.V.' boots.

Figure H1 is a light machine-gunner of No.2 Commando, Albania 1944. The green beret, adopted in late 1942, bears the badge of his unit, and his uniform is denim battledress. Over this he wears a 'battle jerkin', also called an 'assault jerkin', in place of webbing equipment. In addition to his Bren l.m.g. he is armed with a Colt automatic pistol and a Fairbairn-Sykes knife. He wears a camouflaged face veil as a scarf and 'S.V.' boots.

A legendary Commando was killed in the fighting on Lake Comácchio, Italy, in April 1945. Anders 'Andy' Lassen (H2), a Danish national, had joined the Commandos in 1941 to serve with the Small Scale Raiding Force – No.62 Commando – in a number of daring operations mounted from the United Kingdom. Later Lassen served with the Special Boat Section, was promoted to the rank of

The Rhine Crossing, March 1945. In one of the last great battles of the war in Europe, the 1st Commando Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Mills-Roberts, formed the spearhead of the assault across the Rhine. Under the cover of a barrage from 1,500 guns and 400 bomber sorties, the Commandos went into action and within four hours had secured the town of Wesel, taking hundreds of prisoners and establishing a bridgehead. In the photograph above, men of the Brigade headquarters are seen with the flag from the German headquarters in Wesel. (IWM)

Major and won the Military Cross no less than three times. Maj. Andy Lassen was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross for his conduct in his last battle. He is depicted in the uniform of the S.B.S. Note the sand-coloured beret, and the badge and parachute wings of the Special Air Service – adopted by the S.B.S. Note also his blue/grey shirt and the ribbon of the Military Cross.

I: Normandy, 1944

In common with most of the D-Day assault infantry, the Commandos were required to wade ashore carrying with them sufficient rations and ammunition for several days' fighting, as well as the usual complement of clothing and equipment, anti-gas gear, wound dressings, etc. Nearly all personnel carried, in addition, ammunition for support weapons, mines or demolition equipment. Some Commandos were issued with bicycles to boost their mobility!

Figure I1 is a soldier of No.6 Commando armed with a Vickers 'K' gas-operated machine-gun. Designed for aerial combat, these weapons were adapted to the light machine-gun role by the addition of a bipod. The extraordinary sights on the barrel were needed to clear the 96-round drum magazine. Note his special magazine pouches, Bergen rucksack, pistol, knife, life-belt and toggle-rope. Note also his shoulder title and Combined Operations badge.

Commandos in the ruins of Wesel. (IWM)

Equally burdened is the Commando (I2) carrying a 'Flamethrower, Portable, No.2', or the 'Lifebuoy' as it was nicknamed. This alone weighed 64lbs. The remainder of the man's clothing, equipment and weapons took his burden to well over 100lbs. Note that some commandos landed wearing helmets, whilst others were ordered to wear berets.

Once Bergen rucksacks were dumped Commandos were free to fight unencumbered as shown by the sniper (I3). Note his No.4 rifle and No.32 telescopic sight. Extra ammunition, etc., is carried in the pockets of his Denison smock.

J: North-west Europe, 1943–45

Men of No.12 and No.14 Commandos trained in Arctic warfare in order to carry out a series of raids against enemy occupied Norway. They were particularly active in 1943, keeping alive the threat to the enemy's northern flank. The Commando corporal (J1) is from this force, clothed and equipped for skiing operations. Note his fleece-lined cap and snow-goggles, Bergen rucksack,

By 29 April, 1945, the 1st Commando Brigade had crossed the River Elbe to capture the town of Lauenburg. The photograph shows one of the Brigade headquarters' defence posts manned by an Army Commando (a former Seaforth Highlander) and a Royal Marine Commando. (IWM)

In the Far East the 3rd Commando Brigade took part in many seaborne operations, including those on the Arakan coast of Burma in January 1945. In this photograph Commandos from the Brigade are seen boarding their assault landing craft. (IWM)

skeleton assault harness, windproof trousers and Finnish-pattern boots. The insignia on his battledress sleeve includes a Commando shoulder title and a parachutist's wings. His weapon is a Mark 2S silenced Sten 9mm machine-carbine.

By the winter of 1944/45 the Commandos had adopted the airborne soldier's Denison smock, as demonstrated by figure (J2) – a sergeant of No.6 Commando. Lightly equipped for a reconnaissance patrol, he carries spare magazines for his Thompson submachine-gun in the pockets of his smock, with No.36 grenades clipped to his belt. Note the badge of rank and the parachutist's wings stitched to his sleeve, and his 'S.V.' boots. (These were standard 'ammos' with a vulcanised rubber sole fastened to the boot with brass screws.)

A captain (J3) of No.3 Commando in 1945. The badge of his parent regiment – the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry – is worn on his green beret and the shoulder title of his Commando is worn above the patch of the Commando Group. His medal ribbons include the Military Cross, those for active service in Italy and Northwest Europe and 'Mention-in-Despatches' emblem. He wears two wound stripes on his sleeve.

K: The Far East, 1944–45

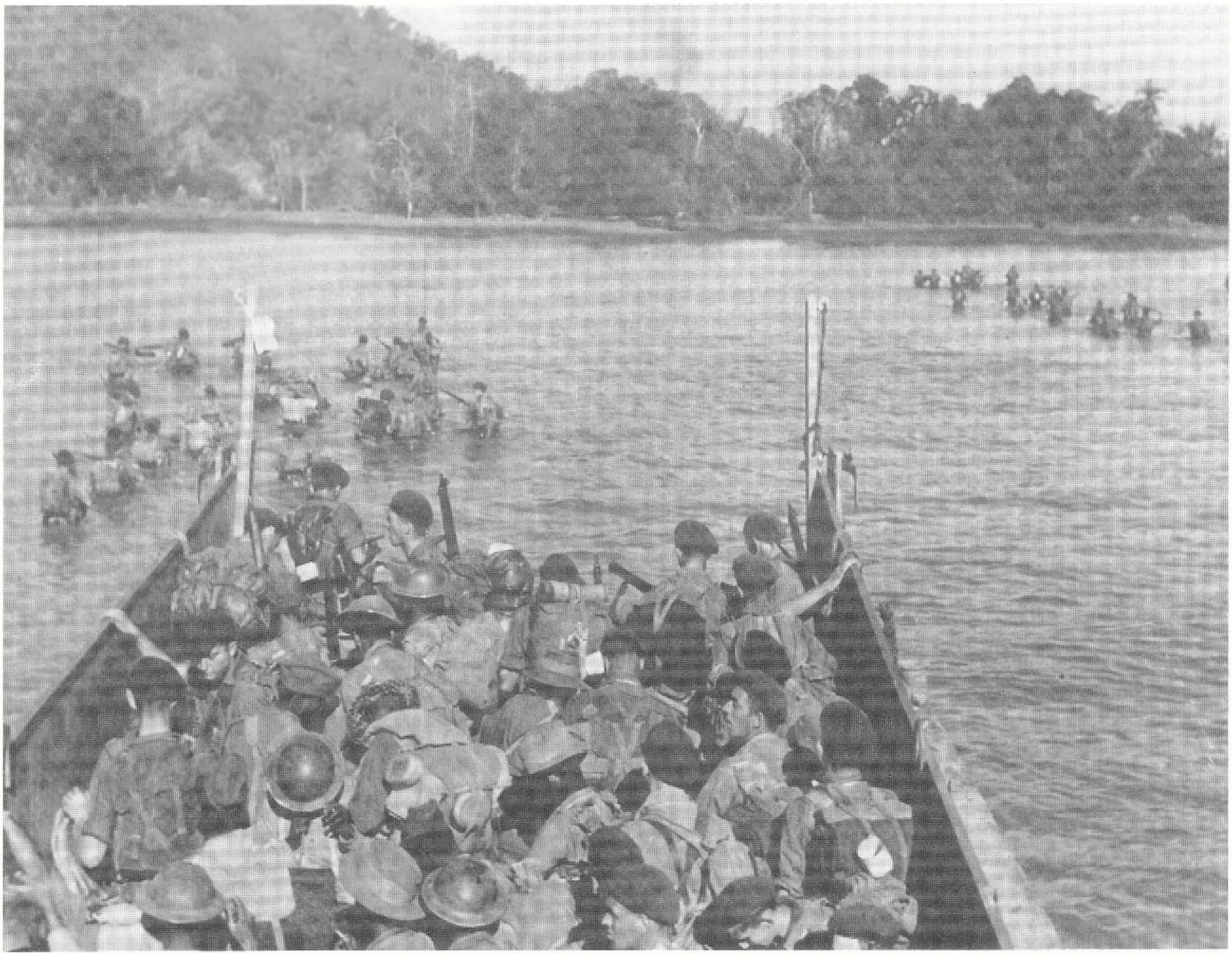
The 3rd Special Service Brigade (later re-titled the 3rd Commando Brigade), consisting of No.1 and No.5 Commandos, sailed for the Far East in 1943 and later went into action against the Japanese in Burma. Second-in-Command of the Brigade in 1945 was Col. Peter Young, an original Commando, and one who had taken part in many early raids. Col. Young (K1) wears in the standard jungle green uniform worn in Burma, on which are worn the badges of rank of a colonel and the ribbons of the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross, 1939-43 Star and the Africa Star.

A soldier of No.1 Commando (K2) in the fighting order worn in Burma in 1945. He still retains one of the US M1 Garand .30-inch rifles issued to the Commando in 1942. He carries 1937-pattern webbing equipment including a toggle-rope, an entrenching tool and a machete.

Operating up and down the Indian Ocean coasts of Burma, Siam, Sumatra and Malaya was the Small Operations Group, which included Groups A, B and C of the Special Boat Section. The S.B.S. carried out numerous operations of sabotage and reconnaissance, landing from canoes. This lieutenant of the S.B.S. (K3) is depicted in 1945. He wears British late-pattern jungle green uniform with US Army jungle boots. Note his badges of rank, parachutist's wings, and the ribbons of the Distinguished Conduct Medal and Africa Star. He is armed with a .45-inch Colt automatic pistol, and is examining a Japanese sword.

L: Commando insignia, 1943/45

By early 1943 the mark of a Commando was the green beret worn with the badge of the Commando's parent regiment (as at L1 Liverpool Scottish), or with the devices of No.2 or No.9 Commandos (L2 and L3).



Commandos landing on the Myebon peninsular, Arakan, from a landing craft of the Royal Indian Navy. (IWM)

Uniform shoulder titles replaced those worn between 1940 and 1942. These had red lettering on a dark blue background and took the form, 'No. – COMMANDO'. These were produced both in printed and embroidered form and were worn with the corners square or rounded off (L4).

A Combined Operations sleeve badge, or 'patch', was designed in 1942, approved by Lord Mountbatten, and was issued for wear towards the end of the year. These badges were originally issued in pairs as a printed design (L5), with the bird and the 'Tommy gun' intended to point forward. Later, embroidered versions were produced, and the badge was worn by army Commandos with a circular backing.

In late 1944 a Commando Group sleeve badge was designed (L6). It replaced the Combined Operations badge in early 1945. Many Commandos qualified as parachutists, wearing the standard wings, and sometimes wings with a black backing (L7). Further examples of later Commando shoulder titles are those of the Commando Group Signals (L8) and No.5 Commando (L9).

Notes sur les planches en couleur

A Insignes des Commandos, 1940/42. A1 Epaulette et écusson du Commando No. 1. A2 Bonnet du Commando No. 2 "autres rangs". A3 Le Commando No. 3 adopta l'épaulette avec les numéros de troupe, ou "H.Q" en dessous. On portait également des épaulettes de troupes. Celles qui sont illustrées appartiennent au premier D Troop et le disque du No. 5 Troop. A4 Epaulettes et cordon du Commando No. 4. A5 Plume de bonnet à poil, épaulette et écusson du Commando No. 5. A6 Bonnet "Tam o'Shanter" No. 6, illustré ici avec le

Farbtafeln

A Abzeichen der Kommandotruppen, 1940/42. A1 Schulterabzeichen und Tuchabzeichen auf dem Ärmel der Kommandotruppe Nr.1. A2 Mütze für "sonstige Ränge" der Kommandotruppe Nr.2. A3 Die Kommandotruppe Nr.3 übernahm das Schulterabzeichen, auf dem Truppennummern, bzw. "H.Q." vermerkt waren. Außerdem trug man Truppentuchabzeichen - die abgebildeten sind der frühen D-Truppe, die Scheibe der Truppe Nr.5 zuzuordnen. A4 Schulterabzeichen und Traggurt der Kommandotruppe Nr.4.

badge du bonnet "VI", une des premières épaulettes "à coulisse" et l'écusson du 101 Troop, pionniers des petites opérations navales. **A7** Ecusson du personnel du siège de la Special Service Brigade. **A8** Plume noire du bonnet à poil du Commando No. 9, adoptée comme badge d'unité et l'épaulette du Commando. **A9** Commando No. 11, le "Commando Ecossais", qui conserva le "T o'S" porté par la plupart des hommes qui le formèrent mais adopta une plume noire de bonnet à poil comme badge d'unité. Ils portaient également un cordon vert. **A10** Epaulette, Commando No. 12. **A11** On sait très peu de choses sur les insignes des commandos du Moyen-Orient sauf que l'épaulette et le badge "coup de poing américain" illustrés, que l'on sait avoir été portés. **A12** Epaulette, Dépôt de Commando. **A13** Ecusson, troupes de signaleurs, Special Service Brigade.

B Origines, 1940/42. **B1** Soldat d'une Compagnie Indépendante dans un manteau doublé d'une peau de mouton et bottes "Shackleton" en plus de son casque et le matériel en toile à sangles de modèle 1937. Son arme est une mitraillette Bren 303 pouces. **B2** Lt-Col J.F. Dumford-Slater portant l'épaulette de son Commando No. 3 et le calot de service et l'uniforme d'un officier des canonniers. **B3** Un Sergent-chef des troupes, Commando No. 1, 1941, qui porte l'uniforme de combat stardard d'un soldat d'infanterie britanique du front.

C1 Lieutenant, Commando No. 6 revenant d'un raid sur la France le 3/4 juin 1942. Il porte son gilet de sauvetage sous sa chemise de combat. Il est armé d'un pistolet automatique Colt 45 pouces. **C2** Major Jack Churchill, Commandant en second, Commando No. 3, Ile de Maaloy, décembre 1941. Notez le couteau Fairbairn-Sykes du Major, son pistolet colt et son matériel en toile d'officier de modèle 1937.

D Le Moyen-Orient, 1941. **D1** Lt-Col Geoffrey Keyes, Commando "Ecossais" No. 11 en 1941 avec le badge de ce régiment sur son bonnet Balmoral, à côté de la plume de bonnet à poil du Commando No. 11. **D2** Commando de Layforce en ordre de raid. Notez le gilet de sauvetage, la corde, la mitraillette Thompson et le couton Fairbairn-Sykes. **D3** Membre du Commando du Moyen-Orient qui examine l'un des modèles de coups de poing américains distribués à son unité. Son badge de calot est une reproduction d'un de ces couteaux. Notez son épaulette.

E Les Grands Raids, 1942. **E1** Lt. Col. A.C. Newman, Régiment d'Essex et Commando No. 2 équipé pour un raid amphibie. Cela comprend l'uniforme d'officier modèle 1937, le gilet de sauvetage modèle naval et une corde. **E2** Sergent, Commando No. 5 prêt à embarquer pour St Nazaire. Il porte un tablier par dessus le kilt et son sac à dos Bergen contient des explosifs, une amorce et des détonateurs. **E3** Signaleur, Commando No. 3 dans l'uniforme porté à Dieppe. Il utilise une radio No. 46.

F Matériel des Commandos. **F1** Sac à dos Bergen. **F2** Bandoulières pour attacher les charges. **F3** Le châssis métallique auquel était attaché le harnais de transport. **F4** Le "harnais d'assaut minimum" permettait de porter des munitions dans ses compartiments, avait un brandebourg pour une baïonnette et, dans le second modèle, des liens pour attacher un outil de tranchées. **F5** Corde. **F6** Gilet de sauvetage. **F7** Pistolet automatique americain Colt 45.

G Armes des commandos. **G1** Mitraillette Thompson. **G2** Pistolet automatique Colt. **G3** Le Commando "De Lisle" possédait un fusil modifié à action Lee-Enfield et un silencieux avec 13 baffles. Cette arme permettait de tuer silencieusement dans un rayon de 400 mètres. **G4** La mitraillette Vickers 'K' 303 pouces. **G5** Le "Rifle, No. 3 Mark 2* (T)", vénérable fusil 303 pouces modèle 1914 équipé d'un téléscope à triple grossissement. **G6** Le couteau de combat Farbairn-Skyes No. 2, également surnommé "Epée romaine" ou "Smatchet", une arme redoutable de 16 pouces de long. **G7** Le 1er modèle Fairbairn-Sykes. **G8** Le coup de poing américain "modèle état-major" du Commando du Moyen-Orient. **G9** Le coup de poing américain "BC41". Un Fairbairn-Sykes de modèle plus tardif. **G10** Tous faisaient environ 13 pouces de long, sauf (G5) qui faisait 8 -pouces.

H Le Moyen-Orient, 1942/45. **H1** Mitrailleur, Commando No. 2, Albanie 1944 en uniforme de combat en denim. Par dessus, il porte un "battle jerkin" également nommé "assault jerkin" au lieu du matériel de toile. Il a une mitraillette Bren, un pistolet automatique Colt et un couteau Fairbairn-Sykes. **H2** Anders "Andy" Lassen, Commando No. 62, qui porte l'uniforme du S.B.S. avec un béret couleur sable et le badge et les ailes de parachutiste du Special Air Service.

I Normandie, 1944. **I1** Soldat, Commando No. 6, armé d'une mitraillette Vickers 'K' au gaz. **I2** Commando portant un "Lance-flammes, Portable, No. 2". **I3** Tireur d'élite. Notez son fusil No. 4 et sa lunette télescopique No. 32. Les munitions supplémentaires etc. se trouvent dans les poches de sa blouse Denison.

J Nord-ouest de l'Europe, 1943/45 **J1** Caporal de Commando, Commando 12 ou 14, habillé et équipé pour les opérations à skis. Son arme est une carabine automatique 9mm Sten Mark 25 à silencieux. **J2** Sergent du Commando No. 6. Il porte une blouse Denison et un équipement léger pour une patrouille de reconnaissance, notamment une mitraillette Thompson. **J3** Capitaine du Commando No. 3 en 1945. Il porte le badge de son régiment sur son béret vert et il porte l'épaulette de son commando au dessus de l'écusson du groupe du commando.

K l'Extrême-Orient, 1944/45. **K1** Col. Peter Young, Commando original dans l'uniforme vert jungle porté à Burma. **K2** Soldat du Commando No. 1 dans l'uniforme de combat porté à Burma en 1945. Il a un fusil américain US M1 Garand de 30 pouces et porte le matériel de toile de modèle 1937 y compris une corde, un outil de tranchées et une machette. **K3** Lieutenant du S.B.S. en 1945, qui porte un uniforme vert jungle britannique de modèle récent et des bottes de jungle de l'armée américaine. Il est armé d'un pistolet automatique Colt .45 pouces et examine une épée japonaise.

L Insignes de Commando, 1943/45 Début 1943, la marque d'un commando était le béret vert porté avec le badge du régiment du commando (comme pour (**L1**) Liverpool Scottish) ou avec les emblèmes des Commandos No. 2 ou No. 9 (**L2** et **L3**). Les épaulettes d'uniforme remplacent celles portées de 1940 à 1942. Elles étaient fabriquées sous forme imprimée et brodée et se portaient avec les angles carrés ou arrondis (**L4**). Ecusson des Combined Operations, dessiné en 1942. Ces badges étaient généralement distribués en paires, sous la forme d'un dessin imprimé (**L5**), l'oiseau et le "Tommy gun" devant pointer vers l'avant. Ensuite, des versions brodées furent produites et le badge était porté par les Commandos de l'armée avec un fond circulaire. Fin 1944, un écusson de Groupe Commando fut dessiné (**L6**). Il remplaça le badge des Combined Operations début 1945. De nombreux commandos se qualifièrent comme parachutistes et portèrent les ailes standard, et quelquefois des ailes sur fond noir (**L7**). On peut voir des exemples plus tardifs d'épaulettes de commando dans le commando Group Signals (**L8**) et le Commando No. 5 (**L9**).

A5 Schmuckfeder, Schulterabzeichen und Tuchabzeichen auf dem Ärmel de Kommandotruppe Nr.5. **A6** "Tam o'Shanter"-Mütze der Kommandotruppe Nr.6, hier mit dem "VI"-Mützenabzeichen, ein frühes "anheftbares" Schulterabzeichen und das Tuchabzeichen auf dem Ärmel der 101-Truppe, Pioniere der Einsätze von Kleinbooten. **A7** Ärmelabzeichen des Personals im Hauptquartier der Special Service Brigade. **A8** Schwarze Schmuckfeder der Kommandotruppe Nr.9, die als Abzeichen der Einheit übernommen wurde, und das Schulterabzeichen der Kommandotruppe. **A9** Kommandotruppe Nr.11, das "schottische Kommando", behielt die "Tam o'Shanter"-Mütze, wie sie die meisten Mitglieder der Truppe trugen, bei, fügte jedoch eine schwarze Schmuckfeder als Abzeichen der Einheit hinzu. Außerdem trug man einen grünen Traggurt. **A10** Schulterabzeichen der Kommandotruppe Nr.12. **A11** Abgesehen von dem Schulterabzeichen und dem abgebildeten "Schlagringmesser"- Abzeichen, das getragen wurde, ist über die Abzeichen der Kommandotruppen im Nahen Osten nur wenig bekannt. **A12** Schulterabzeichen, Kommando-Depot. **A13** Tuchabzeichen auf dem Ärmel, Funktruppe, Special Service Brigade.

B Ursprünge, 1940/42. **B1** Soldat einer unabhängigen Kompanie in einem mit Lammfell gefütterten Mantel und "Shackleton"-Stiefeln. Dazu trägt er seinen Helm und die Gurtband-Ausrüstung Modell 1937. Bei seiner Waffe handelt es sich um ein .303-inch Bren-Maschinengewehr. **B2** Lt.-Col. J.F. Durnford-Slater mit dem Schulterabzeichen seiner Kommandotruppe Nr.3 und der Feldmütze und Uniform eines Schützenoffiziers. **B3** Hauptfeldwebel der Truppe, Kommandotruppe Nr.1, 1941, im standardmäßigen Kampfanzug eines britischen Infanteristen der damaligen Zeit.

C1 Oberleutnant der Kommandotruppe Nr.6 bei der Rückkehr von einem Überfall auf Frankreich am 3./4. Juni 1942. Der Rettungsring wird unter dem Hemd des Kampfanzugs getragen. Er hat eine .45-inch Colt-Selbstladepistole bei sich. **C2** Major Jack Churchill, stellvertretender Kommandeur der Kommandotruppe Nr.3, auf Maaloy Island im Dezember 1941. Man beachte das Fairbairn-Sykes-Messer des Majors, den Colt und die Gurtband-Ausrüstung für Offiziere, Modell 1937.

D Der Nahe Osten, 1941. **D1** Lt.-Col. Geoffrey Keyes, "schottische" Kommandotruppe Nr.11, 1941, mit dem Abzeichen seines Regiments auf der Balmoral-Mütze neben der Schmuckfeder der Kommandotruppe Nr.11. **D2** Ein Layforce-Kommando in überfallbereiter Aufstellung. Man beachte den bekannten Rettungsring, das Knebelseil, die Thompson-Maschinenpistole und das Fairbairn-Sykes-Messer. **D3** Ein Mitglied der Kommandotruppe im Nahen Osten außer Dienst betrachtet sich eine der zahlreichen Muster an Schlangringmessern, die an diese Einheit ausgegeben wurden. Sein Mützenabzeichen ist eine Reproduktion eines solchen Messers. Man beachte sein Schulterabzeichen.

E Die großen Überfälle, 1942. **E1** Lt.-Col. A.C. Newman, Essex Regiment und Kommandotruppe Nr.2 ist für einen Überfall zu Land und Wasser ausgerüstet. Dazu gehört die Gurtband-Ausrüstung für Offiziere, Modell 1937, der Rettungsring im Marinestil und ein Knebelseil. **E2** Feldwebel, Kommandotruppe Nr.5 zur Einschiffung nach St. Nazaire bereit. Über dem Kilt wurde ein Schurz getragen, und der Bergen-Rucksack enthält Sprengstoff, Zündschnur und Zündkapseln. **E3** Funker der Kommandotruppe Nr.3 in der bei Dieppe getragenen Uniform. Er bedient ein Funkgerät Nr.46.

F Ausrüstung der Kommandotruppen. **F1** Bergen-Rucksack. **F2** Schlaufen, an denen man Lasten befestigen konnte. **F3** Das Metallgestell, an dem die Tragegurte festgemacht waren. **F4** In den Taschen des "Angriffsgurts" konnte man Munition transportieren, und er hatte eine Schlaufe für ein Bajonett. Das zweite Modell des Gurts hatte darüberhinaus Laschen zum Befestigen eines Schanzwerkzeugs. **F5** Das Knebelseil. **F6** Rettungsring. **F7** Amerikanische .45 Colt-Selbstladepistole.

G Die Waffen der Kommandotruppen. **G1** Thompson-Maschinenpistole. **G2** Colt-Selbstladepistole. **G3**: "De Lisle Commando" mit einem modifizierten Lee-Enfield-Mechanismus und einem Schalldämpfer mit 13 Schallwänden, wodurch die Waffe lautloses Töten auf 365 Meter ermöglichte. **G4** .303-inch Vickers "K"-Maschinengewehr. **G5** "Rifle, No.1 Mark 1* (T)" - das ehrwürdige .303-inch Gewehr, Modell 1914, mit einem Teleskop mit dreifacher Vergrößerung ausgerüstet. **G6** Fairbairn-Sykes-Kampfmesser Nr.2, auch als "Roman sword" oder "Smatchet" bekannt, eine furchteinflößende Waffe, 40 cm lang. **G7** Erstes Modell des Fairbairn-Sykes. **G8** Schlagring "Feldzeug-Modell" der Kommandotruppe im Nahen Osten. **G9** Schlagring "BC41". **G10** Späteres Modell des Fairbairn-Sykes. Die Waffen waren alle etwa 33 cm lang, außer **G8** mit einer Länge von 21,5 cm.

H Der Nahe Osten, 1942/45. **H1** Schütze eines leichten Maschinengewehrs, Kommandotruppe Nr.2, 1944 in Albanien im Denim-Kampfanzug. Darüber trägt er anstatt der Gurtband-Ausrüstung eine sogenannte "Kampfweste" oder auch "Angriffsweste". Er hat ein Bren-leichtes Maschinengewehr, eine Colt-Selbstladepistole und ein Fairbairn-Sykes-Messer bei sich. **H2** Anders "Andy" Lassen, Kommandotruppe Nr.62 in der Uniform der S.B.S. mit sandfarbenem Barett und dem Abzeichen und Fallschirmspringerabzeichen des Special Air Service.

I Die Normandie, 1944 **I1** Soldat, Kommandotruppe Nr.6, bewaffnet mit einem Vickers "K"-gasbetriebenen Maschinengewehr. **I2** Kommandotruppe mit dem "tragbaren Flammenwerfer Nr.2". **I3** Heckenschütze. Man beachte sein Gewehr Nr.4 und das Teleskop Nr.32. Reservemunition usw. trägt er in den Taschen seines Denison-Kittels.

J Nordwesteuropa, 1943/45 **J1** Unteroffizier der Kommandotruppe Nr.12 oder 14, für den Einsatz auf Skiern angezogen und ausgerüstet. Bei seiner Waffe handelt es sich um einen 9mm-Sten-Maschinenkarabiner Mark 25 mit Schalldämpfer. **J2** Feldwebel der Kommandotruppe Nr.6 in einem Denison-Kittel und mit einer Thompson-Maschinenpistole für eine Spähpatrouille ausgerüstet. **J3** Hauptmann der Kommandotruppe Nr.3, 1945. Er trägt das Abzeichen seines Mutterregiments auf seinem grünen Barett, das Schulterabzeichen seiner Kommandotruppe über dem Tuchabzeichen der Kommandogruppe.

K Der Ferne Osten, 1944/45. **K1** Col. Peter Young, Original-Kommando, in der dschungelgrünen Standarduniform, wie sie in Birma getragen wurde. **K2** Soldat der Kommandotruppe Nr.1 im Kampfanzug, wie er 1945 in Birma getragen wurde. Er hat ein US M1 Garand .30-inch-Gewehr bei sich und trägt die Gurtband-Ausrüstung Modell 1937, einschließlich Knebelseil, Schanzwerkzeug und eine Machete. **K3** Oberleutnant der S.B.S. 1945 in der britischen dschungelgrünen Uniform späten Modells und Dschungelstiefel der amerikanischen Armee. Er ist mit einer .45-inch Colt-Selbstladepistole bewaffnet und untersucht ein japanisches Schwert.

L Abzeichen der Kommandotruppen, 1943/45. Anfang 1943 war das grüne Barett mit dem Abzeichen des Mutterregiments (wie Liverpool Scottish bei **L1**) oder den Abzeichen der Kommandotruppen Nr.2 bzw. Nr.9 (wie bei **L2** und **L3**) zum Erkennungszeichen einer Kommandotruppe geworden. Die Schulterabzeichen, die von 1940 bis 1942 getragen wurden, wurden durch einheitliche Schulterabzeichen ersetzt. Diese erschienen sowohl in aufgedruckter als auch in aufgestickter Form und wurden mit eckigen oder abgerundeten Ecken getragen (**L4**). 1942 wurde ein Ärmelabzeichen, bzw. "Tuchabzeichen" für "Combined Operations" entworfen. Die Abzeichen wurden ursprünglich paarweise mit aufgedrucktem Muster ausgegeben (**L5**), das einen Vogel und ein nach vorne zeigendes "Tommy gun" darstellte. Später kamen auch gestickte Abzeichen in Umlauf, und das Abzeichen wurde von den Kommandotruppen des Heers mit einer runden Unterlage getragen. Ende 1944 entstand ein Ärmelabzeichen für Kommandogruppen (**L6**). Anfang 1945 trat es an die Stelle des Abzeichens für "Combined Operations". Viele Mitglieder der Kommandotruppen ließen sich als Fallschirmspringer ausbilden und trugen das standardmäßige Fliegerabzeichen, manchmal auch das Fliegerabzeichen auf schwarzem Hintergrund (**L7**). Weitere Beispiele für die späteren Schulterabzeichen der Kommandotruppen sind die der Funker-Kommandotruppe (**L8**) und der Kommandotruppe Nr.5 (**L9**).

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Titles continued on inside back cover

Avec annotations en francais sur les planches en couleur
Mit Aufzeichnungen auf Deutsch über den Farbtafeln

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